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OR,
INJUN NICK ON DECK.

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CALIFORNIA CLAUDE," "FLASH
DAN," "COOL CONRAD," "DENVER DUKE,"
"BONANZA BAND," "DESPERATE
DOZEN," "LOST BONANZA,"
"CAPTAIN COLDGRIP,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
TWO SCENES.

A BOUNDLESS plain and a burning sun!
As far as eye can reach not a vestige of vege-
table life is to be seen.

The air is like the breath of a furnace, and the
ground is black and covered with the remains
of burned grass.

The whole picture is one of desolation relieved
in but one place, and that is where a horse and
his rider are outlined against the sky.

The man sits upright and hatless in the heavy
Mexican saddle, hatless in the blaze of that
merciless sun!

He is a handsome man, dark of skin, with an
elegant figure, a coal black eye and a drooping

"I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU, PARD," SAID A VOICE AT COLDGRIP'S EAR. "IF I HAVEN'T
LOST MY SIGHT OUR OLD ENEMY INJUN NICK IS IN TOWN!"

mustache from which, apparently, all life has been taken.

He wears an open jacket with bright metal buttons and silver lace; his pantaloons are wide and have a gold stripe down the outside seam, and his waist is encircled by a dark red sash with fringe at the ends.

This person, who would attract attention anywhere, is about forty years old; he looks like a New Mexican rancher, though he may be a Texan.

The horse, a black animal fitted for speed and endurance, is moving slowly toward the west. He shows signs of fatigue like the man in the saddle whose eye occasionally flashes with sparks of vengeance.

If the reader could have approached that solitary rider across the Texan plain he would have seen that he was no voluntary traveler.

Stout ropes like those used in lassoing lashed the man to the horse, and his hands were bound on his back.

He was alone on the arid waste, and the sun was beating down upon him with all its power.

There was something pitiable in the helplessness of this lone rider, although he looked like a desperado who had not been doomed for nothing.

The horse kept slowly on, his hoofs disturbing the blackened particles of burned grass.

There were abundant signs that, like his rider, he was suffering for want of water, but not a drop was in sight.

The torturing sun reached the meridian and began to decline toward the West.

By and by the man saw something that lent a new light to his eyes. It was not on the plain, but in the sky.

An hour later the doomed pair—the horse and his rider—were as statues on the plain.

The animal seemed to have reached the limit of endurance; his posture showed that he was almost ready to give up the struggle.

The ill-fated pair had something to look at now; the air which had been so clear had more than fifty winged inhabitants.

The American vulture had come to a feast which could not be long delayed. The huge wings flapped in the face of the unfortunate man, and at times lifted his long black hair.

He watched the birds with close-set teeth and glareful eyes. He knew he was at their mercy without power to lift a finger to beat them off.

It was a sight that would have stirred any one's blood.

The dark birds circled and swooped about the man on the horse, but did not offer to alight. They saw by the eyes that life was still left, but that it was now of short time.

"Oh, you infernal monsters!" suddenly cried the man and his voice frightened the vultures off for a minute. "They knew when they sent me out on this journey that you would meet me somewhere! They rendered me helpless against you, you devils of the air! I would give the secret that has doomed me to this for my revolvers for two minutes. I'd kill you all and drink your blood! And then—then, by heaven! I'd turn back and make some men wish they had never been born!"

The birds came back when he had ceased; they came with a determination, as it were, to fight a battle for the inhuman feast.

The lone man cursed them with all his might; he hurled a string of mad epithets at them, and in his rage tugged like a giant at his unyielding bonds.

But it was all in vain.

The sun sunk before this one-sided struggle; it saw the horse drop to the ground with a groan of despair.

Down came the birds in a charging flock and the man shrieked as the talons touched him!

But let us turn from this terrible scene, reader; let us bridge distance with a cable of ink and set ourselves down in a great city more than a thousand miles away.

It was open day when we left the Texan plain; it is night now and the thousand and one lamps of Broadway look like fireflies in a row.

In an upper room on this world-known street sit two men at a table whose cover is a map of the Southwest States and Territories of the Union.

They are yet young in years as life is rated nowadays, and one bears more than a slight resemblance to the man whom we have just left among the vultures.

Across that portion of the map which embraces western Texas and New Mexico are many lines and dots, some of which show that they have been lately written.

"I shall begin here," says the man we have particularly mentioned of the two, and he laid his finger on one of the dots and moved it slowly over a line which crossed the New Mexican borders near the Canadian River. "I have studied the whole plan carefully. I have given it six months thought, for there has been no need of haste. The die has been cast, colonel, and I am ready."

The eyes of the man called colonel suddenly took on a new glitter. He looked a moment at his companion and then gave his hand.

"There are millions in this!" he exclaimed.

"I see ourselves money kings of Wall street or

nabobs of the Southwest—I will be satisfied with either station."

"I don't want either!" declared the other. "I wouldn't turn my hand over to be a billionaire. I am content to be what I am, colonel—nothing more."

"And that is—"

"Simply Claude Coldgrip, detective," was the reply, couched in somewhat exultant tones. "I am ready for the venture," he went on rapidly. "To tell the truth, I have grown tired of the city. My last adventure in the wild West has given me a fondness for the life one finds there. I am eager to go back to it."

"You will have to be careful, but I need not admonish you, captain," was the response. "I need not even remind you that you have an enemy somewhere—one who may take an active and desperate hand in this gold quest of ours."

The detective smiled.

"My old foe, Injun Nick, eh, colonel?" he said.

"I mean the red rattler."

"Oh! I have not heard of the fellow for two years," was the answer. "The Scarlet Hercules, as we used to call him here, escaped from the Tombs before he could be tried for participation in certain breaches of the law, and since then I have lost sight of him. But what made you warn me against him?"

"I hardly know, but I presume the warning came naturally from the stories you have told me about the desperateness and fox-like cunning of this civilized red-skin."

"Don't let Injun Nick trouble you, colonel," laughed the detective. "If I am to meet him, he will be met with an eye single to our success. You are prepared for the discovery that this secret may amount to nothing, I suppose?"

"Mighty Caesar! no!" cried the colonel, almost bounding from his chair. "I am prepared for nothing of the kind. What have we gleaned from the old charts and papers? Don't they tell us that this El Dorado exists somewhere as certainly as we live? You are going to unravel the tangled skein—you are to find the Gold Mount that is waiting for us. Don't intimate to me that it may not exist. It does! it shall be found! And you, Captain Coldgrip, shall find it."

"If you are determined on this point, it shall be found," smiled the detective.

"And I shall become the king bear of Wall street? Good! Remember, Captain, that your share is to equal mine. When do you start?"

"Now."

"Why not wait till morning?"

"I never wait an hour," returned Coldgrip. "If the secret is to be solved the sooner we start on the quest the better."

"That is true. Here's Colonel Cantwell's hand for success! Let nothing daunt you. Ah! you are forgetting the map!"

"I don't want it. I've got the map and the papers all here," and the detective touched his forehead.

The two men shook hands in the mellow gaslight that illumined the room and in a moment one was gone.

The man who went back to the table was a handsome person, with a flowing beard and clear gray eyes. He was in excellent humor, for he looked at the map spread out before him and tapped it playfully with his fingers.

"Coldgrip has gone!" he said to himself.

"The coolest and shrewdest detective in America. I don't take to myself much credit for the discovery of this golden secret; he did the work—hard work it was, too—but I am to get the lion's share! Colonel Julius Cantwell, millionaire! By Jove! that has a royal sound that makes one's blood tingle. I was born for this. Jehosaphat! won't I make the gold gudgeons of Wall street hold their breath when my agent reports? I can afford to wait, but the days will seem years. Colonel, you're in luck! you must drink to your unprecedented success!"

The happy man went to a sideboard and helped himself to some liquor, that lent a new twinkle to his eyes. He saw himself a millionaire already, and each succeeding drink increased the amount of his wealth. In short, it would be safe to say that at that particular moment Colonel Julius Cantwell was the happiest man in New York.

As for the detective who had just left him, charged with one of the most dangerous missions of his life, he walked rapidly down the lighted street, and was soon lost to view.

Thirty minutes later he faced a beautiful little girl of fourteen, in a plainly-furnished room, and told her that he was about to quit the city.

"Not to-night, Captain Claude?" exclaimed the child, whom he held in his arms.

"Yes, to-night, Estelle."

"Are you going on that long hunt you told me about once?"

"Yes."

A sudden pallor drove all color from the child's face; she started back.

"It is a long ways—more than a thousand miles, isn't it?" she exclaimed.

"It is a long distance," answered the detective, calmly, but with a slight smile of reassurance.

"I wish you hadn't told me about that enemy

of yours, Captain Claude," she said after a little silence.

"What enemy?"

"Injun Nick."

"Warned again!" laughed Coldgrip. "Forewarned is forearmed, you know, Estelle. I will not forget this. Now, get me the packet."

The child slipped from his arms and ran to a dressing-stand, which she unlocked. Diving a hand into a drawer, she found a little package, with which she came toward the detective.

"You are not to open this till you are at least five hundred miles away," she enjoined, placing the packet in his hands. "And now, if you are going, Captain Claude, good-by!"

The handsome detective caught the beautiful child in his arms and embraced her fondly. Her lips found their way to his ear, and she solemnly whispered words that changed the man's color.

All at once he put her down gently and moved toward the door; the next moment he was gone.

"It was a strange dream for a child. No wonder it awakened her," he said to himself. "Why should a child, here in New York, dream about a man lashed to a horse and attacked by vultures on a burned plain? I never heard of anything like this."

He was on the street again, and did not stop until he had put a river between him and New York.

He seemed eager to get away from the city, like a man anxious to throw himself upon a certain trail.

Twenty minutes later the cars were carrying him away, and another wild chase had begun.

CHAPTER II.

SAN DIEGO DOLPH.

SIX months later almost to the very night that witnessed Claude Coldgrip's departure from New York, a man rode into a New Mexican town in a cloud of dust that entirely hid his person.

The day had almost terminated, but the effects of its warmth were observable in the countless men who lounged in the shadows of the buildings and smoked and discussed mining, cattle-raising and gaming.

An entrance like this into San Tonquin was a frequent occurrence, and when the rider drew rein before a building called by courtesy a hotel, the loafers on the veranda which extended the whole length of the building, paid no particular attention to him.

A few smokers might have noticed that he possessed a good figure and a roving eye which took in a great deal at a single glance.

The man may have been forty, but he looked younger. His beard was full and intensely black. He wore the garments of a mine-owner or rancher, and his general appearance betokened considerable wealth.

The light wind astir at the time blew the dust that enveloped him aside, and seeing the occupants of the porch, miners, herders, gamblers and cowboys, he rode forward and touched the broad brim of his sombrero by way of salutation.

Nobody seemed to know him, but he was not backward in introducing himself.

"Gentlemen, I am Adolphus Redspur—San Diego Dolph, at your service," he announced. "It seems to me that this is the driest crowd I've seen for a month. Let's proceed to lubricate." And he slid from the saddle leaving the reins on the neck of his horse.

The whole crowd moved spontaneously, and when San Diego Dolph entered the hotel he had every man at his heels. The little bar-room was more than comfortably filled when the last cowboy entered, and for ten minutes there was a rapid consumption of liquor at the stranger's expense.

If he intended to make himself "solid" at San Tonquin, San Diego Dolph was taking the right course. He evidently knew how to carry on negotiations with men of the stamp around him.

When the visitor came from the bar room he was one of the lions of the hour.

"Where will I find the padre?" he said, to a man at his elbow.

"Which one, colonel?"

"Ah! have you two?"

"Yes; 'Selmo an' Cortez."

"Which one is the oldest?"

"Selmo."

"Where does he live?"

"In the little house just behind the church down yonder," answered the miner, pointing down the street. "'Selmo, as we call him, is a queer mixture of mystery an' blood. He looks like he is one hundred years old, but Jerusalem! he has the strength of three men. Padre Cortez is a young man who hasn't been in San Tonquin long. We like him, though, for he comes out among the boys sometimes an' always holds a rattlin' hand o' aces an' such things. You're sartain it is 'Selmo you want to see, colonel?"

"Selmo!" responded San Diego Dolph, sentimentally; and away he went down the street, his horse following at his heels like a faithful dog.

The crowd looked on and passed a few com-

monplace and half-humorous remarks. Some wondered what that man wanted with a little, dried-up specimen of humanity like the Padre Anselmo, or 'Selmo, as San Tonquin universally called him.

San Diego Dolph kept on till he reached the poor little church where the padre conducted the ceremonies of his religion. It was small, indeed, but notwithstanding this, it almost concealed the quarters of the padre.

The handsome man went straight to the door of the padre's hut.

"I'm goin' to know somethin' before I leave here," he mused. "After what I've endured, I have a right to all I can get by fair means or foul. Ah! here we are!"

At that moment the door opened, and 'Selmo was before him—a little man, sure enough, with a dark face and two little eyes that snapped like a serpent's.

San Diego Dolph took off his hat to the father who held the door open as if in mute invitation, and a moment later Redspur crossed the threshold.

"Well, my son, what can I do for you?" asked 'Selmo, who was still eying his visitor with a great deal of curiosity.

"A good deal perhaps," was the quick answer. "Shall we sit down?"

The little padre went to his stool which stood at a small table in the middle of the room, and San Diego Dolph dropped upon another exactly like it.

"I am here on business," he went on, coming at once to the subject matter of his visit, and his eyes became fixed on the padre. "I want to know if you know anything about this?"

As he spoke he drew from an inner pocket a small packet which he opened and revealed a piece of parchment-like paper.

Father 'Selmo took it and started slightly when his eyes fell upon the writing it contained.

The bit of paper was not larger than the priest's mummy-like hand, but it was closely-written over in Spanish; the chirography was small but legible.

It was evident that 'Selmo had seen the document before, or knew of its existence, for his start had not escaped San Diego Dolph.

The visitor leaned forward; there was only a poor little table between him and the priest, and the lamp swinging overhead showed the situation.

"Do I know, my son?" repeated 'Selmo at last and then a faint smile appeared at the corners of his mouth. "I know, but you must not ask me any further."

San Diego Dolph started forward as if impelled by an electric shock.

One hand shot across the table and clutched the padre's wrist.

"I am here to know!" he said, not loud but sternly. "That paper is the key to the old Spanish bonanza which has been lost for years. More than a thousand men have failed to find it; many have died on the trail. I have suffered a dozen deaths, but I haven't given up the chase. You need not ask why I came to you with this clew. I am here. No! you don't slip through my fingers, Father 'Selmo. I am more than San Diego Dolph. Now answer my questions truly."

For a moment the little padre looked across the table with the eyes of a cornered tiger. They looked strangely out of place behind the parchment-like skin that seemed glued to his cheeks.

"I am not bound to tell," he suddenly exclaimed, and then he jerked loose from the hunter's grip and sprang up.

San Diego Dolph followed him in a moment, the table was pushed headlong, and the padre retreated to the wall.

"I'll show you whether I am to be cheated out of the bonanza at the very door of it!" the visitor cried. "By the thousand gods of Olympus! I am here to play the gold game out!"

San Diego Dolph descending upon Father 'Selmo threatened to crush him in an instant. It looked like a lion falling upon a cat. But, all at once, the little padre caught the big hands that darted at him, and the gold sport was thrown back almost to the opposite wall.

Padre 'Selmo's ninety years had not sapped his strength.

Dolph was thunderstruck at this unexpected display of power.

Padre 'Selmo was standing erect, with his eyes riveted upon his unwelcome visitor. He was evidently waiting for another attack, which he did not in end to shun.

"By Jove! we don't want war," protested the sport, with a laugh. "I didn't come here for a fight!"

"No; you're a man of peace, I see," returned the priest, sarcastically. "You have stated all your business, Mister San Diego Dolph, let me say that the door is at your back."

"Which means, I suppose, that you won't talk about the meanin' of that paper."

"It means that, exactly," answered the little padre. "Here is your paper. A trailer like you ought to be able to solve the mystery for yourself!" And the priest threw the parchment toward the sport, at whose feet it fell.

"Look here, can't we compromise?" was the

next tack. "What do you want with the secret of the Padre's Palace, as the lost mine is called? Men of your stripe have no use for gold. You can't become a Southwest nabob nor a California gold king. I am fitted for either station. Look at me!" And the magnificent figure of San Diego Dolph rose to its full height.

"If you give me the secret it will save you further trouble," he went on. "I am not the only person who is on the trail. There may be a thousand on it. I have been hunted like a dog because I know that the mine exists, an' because I am near it. Let me show you something, Father 'Selmo."

Dolph opened his dark shirt-front as he started toward the little priest.

"Look at my breast!" he continued. "I have suffered a thousand deaths that I might stand here to-night."

The padre of San Tonquin was leaning forward with burning curiosity. The lamp-light fell upon the sport-adventurer and showed the priest a breast covered with scars that were frightful to look at.

"I got these marks for the Padre's Palace," declared the sport. "I have been tied to a horse an' turned adrift on a grassless plain. I have been picked an' torn by vultures under a red-hot sun! My torture beat the tortures of the damned. All for the lost Spanish Mine—all for the secret of that bit of paper! You know what it means. When I first gave it to you your start gave the whole thing away. I don't want to fight a priest, but I do want the Padre's Palace. They say it is a mine of ill-omen. I don't care if it is peopled by a million devils. Legend says that it is flooded, an' by water that cramps a man the moment he touches it. I want to find it if that water is a poisoned sea! I was made a Mazeppa under the name of Jack Javert, but I am here as San Diego Dolph. What are you goin' to do, Father 'Selmo? Shall it be war or peace?"

The padre drew back and folded his arms. "It is what you make it," he said calmly to his visitor.

Dolph shut his hands and his eyes gave a sudden flash.

He seemed about to throw himself for the second time upon the padre.

"Hello!" rung out a loud voice from without.

"Hello in thar, San Diego Dolph!"

The sport started and turned half-way round.

"Who wants me, I wonder?" he said.

"Go an' see."

Redspur opened the low door and looked out.

Night had fallen over San Tonquin, and the little church standing directly in front of 'Selmo's hut rendered the spot darker than any other place.

"Ain't yer comin' out?" repeated the voice that had saluted him.

"Here I am," called out Dolph, walking from the priest's quarters and alongside the church.

"Hyer he is, sure enough!"

The next moment the mine-hunter stood before twenty men and a stalwart fellow whose hat had an unusual brim, stepped forward.

"Colonel," he said, "we don't like ter disturb you, but a man dead as a door nail came ter San Tonquin awhile ago an' clutched in one o' his hands war a paper like ther one I hold."

Several torches rendered it light enough for San Diego Dolph to see the paper which the speaker extended.

He took it and leaned forward to read the scrawl it contained. In a moment he had mastered it, for it contained but one sentence.

"My blood is on the hands of San Diego Dolph!"

The accused man looked up coolly.

"Show me the corpse!" he demanded.

CHAPTER III.

ACQUITTED.

As a matter of course, San Diego Dolph went down the streets of San Tonquin under guard.

"I'm anxious to see this dead man by whom I am accused of murder," he said to himself.

"The paper says plain enough that his blood is on my hands, an' heaven knows that I haven't had the drop on a human bein' for months. It's all about the lost mine, though; I'll bet my head on that."

The crowd conducted the padre's visitor to the hotel in which he had lately treated it. Several little groups stood in front of the building, and on the veranda, now almost deserted, lay a human-like object at full length on the floor.

"This is the man whose hands held ther paper we gave yer, colonel," the leader said to San Diego Dolph, when he had been led upon the porch.

The accused man bent over the dead with a good deal of eagerness, and the crowd by which he was completely surrounded watched him like a lot of hawks while they held their breath.

Dolph saw before him a slenderly built young man, not more than twenty-five, with a smooth face, finely chiseled and handsome. There was something almost boyish about the features, and the sport shut his lips madly when he thought that he had been accused of murdering him.

"I don't know him. I never saw him before

now!" declared Dolph, rising to an erect position and facing the spokesman of the crowd. "I deny the charge written on the paper you gave me."

There was honest indignation visible in every lineament of the speaker's face. His eyes flashed with righteous resentment.

"You have no right to take that paper for proof," continued San Diego, pointing to the accusation in the leader's hands. "You don't know that the dead man wrote it. When did he come to San Tonquin?"

"A little while ago."

"Horseback?"

"Yes."

"How did he ride?"

"He war lyin' across ther saddle with his hands hangin' down, an' this paper war clutched in one ov them."

"He was stone dead when he came?"

"Dead as a door nail."

"Was he warm?"

"Doctor Bud examined him; let him speak as ter ther. This way, doctor."

San Diego Dolph saw the man who responded to the name and title of Doctor Bud, and fixed his gaze upon him.

"We want the clean cut truth, doctor," he warned. "Was this man warm when you examined him?"

"He was not," answered the doctor promptly. "In my opinion he had been dead some time."

"How long?"

"I cannot say exactly, but probably—"

The doctor paused and fell into a train of thought while he looked attentively at the corpse lying before him.

"I should say several hours at least," he added at last.

"Three?" asked San Diego Dolph.

"Probably three."

A moment's silence followed the last answer.

"Let me see ther charge, captain," said the accused sport stretching forth his hand for the paper. "It has not been shown that this charge was made by the dead man," he went on. "He came to San Tonquin, hanging across the saddle, and the doctor says he had been dead three hours. Dead men don't fix themselves on a horse in that manner; they don't write charges like this, and then deliver them in person. Look the whole case squarely in the face, gentlemen. I am not going to run away from this accusation. You will find San Diego Dolph here when you want him, but he says now in answer to this paper that it contains an infamous lie! I swear I never to my recollection saw this man before to-night. I have enemies who would do more than make a corpse carry a lie, but I will not name them here."

He ceased like a man who has said all he intends to say, and stepped back, leaving his fate to the crowd by which he was surrounded.

Would he be acquitted or held? Which?

"You don't care if we adjourn for consultation, colonel?" asked the leader.

"No. I don't want San Tonquin to make up a verdict on the spur of the moment. I am innocent or guilty. If you adjourn you will find me here when you have decided."

Taking the speaker at his word the crowd adjourned to the bar attached to the hotel, and when the door had been closed San Diego Dolph found himself alone with the dead.

A silvery crescent in a cloudless sky showed him the white face and stiffened figure of the person whose blood he was accused of shedding.

He leaned against one of the wooden pillars of the porch, folded his arms, and looked at the dead.

"I don't understand this," he muttered. "Can this be the work of that Indian and his gang? Do they know that San Diego Dolph is Jack Javert, the man they lashed to a horse and sent to the vultures six months ago? If they do know this, why do they kill this young stranger and send him to San Tonquin with a message accusing me of murder? Why don't they face me as I will some day face every living devil of them? I was not permitted to finish with Father 'Selmo. I believe I can bring the little padre to terms, for I am on the right track. He knows the secret of the lost mine, and he shall live to give it up to me!"

By the time the sport finished the door at his left opened and the crowd came out.

"Colonel, we've concluded ther ther charge ag'in' yer ain't sustained," said the big man at the head of it. "Ther decision war unanimous; it war ther voice of San Tonquin through her representatives."

"Thanks, gentlemen," said San Diego Dolph. "I tell you now that I will not stop till I have proved my innocence."

"We believe it without proof," was the answer. "It is suggested at my back, colonel, ther ther court is rayther dry. Its deliberations war such—"

San Diego Dolph did not wait for the speaker to conclude. His voice already exhibited signs of huskiness, and the stranger sport marched the crowd into the bar-room where he stood the expense of a good deal of San Tonquin liquor.

"I'll go back now and finish my interview with the padre," he said, leaving the happy crowd.

He passed out upon the porch, but stopped suddenly before he had taken three steps.

A man and a stranger was bending over the dead man. He was holding one of the cold hands while he gazed into the marble face upon which the soft moonlight fell.

San Diego Dolph was thunderstruck.

"In God's name! who is this?" he murmured, and then, despite his amazement, he leaned forward and glared at the unknown.

All at once the new-comer arose, and the next moment he and San Diego Dolph stood face to face.

"Whose work is that?" asked the stranger, pointing toward the dead. "That young man has been murdered!"

"That's a holy fact," answered Dolph, not ceasing to stare at the speaker, who was built like himself and had a handsome countenance. "He came in awhile ago, in the fix he's in now, and in his hand was a paper which accused me of killing him."

"You—who are you?"

"San Diego Dolph. And you?"

"Call me Gilded George, but that is not my name," was the answer, accompanied by a faint smile. "Will you let me see the paper the dead man brought to San Tonquin?"

San Diego Dolph ran his hand into one of his pockets and produced the accusation.

"We don't want to talk here," remarked Gilded George. "Let us walk away."

The two men thus strangely met went down the street together.

Dolph could not help looking at the man at his elbow.

"Another fellow never seen before," he muttered. "I wonder if the secret of the Padre's Palace fetched him here?"

The twain did not stop until the last cabin of the town had been reached. Then Gilded George struck a match and held it over the paper which had accused Dolph of murder.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Dolph as the match was thrown away.

"The dead man back there didn't write this."

"I know that—at least, I was ready to swear he didn't. Do you know who did write it?"

San Diego Dolph thought he saw the eyes before him glisten suddenly.

"What would you do if I should tell you?" suddenly asked Gilded George.

"I would show him, maybe, that he can't accuse San Diego Dolph of murder and escape vengeance!" grated the sport.

"Oh, you would?" smiled the stranger.

"Try me!"

"Come, my fine fellow, don't show your claws for a trifle like this," and Gilded George placed his hand on Dolph's shoulder. "If I told you who wrote this accusation you might change your mind, for the writer is no boy."

"You won't tell me, then?" cried Dolph.

"Maybe the accuser is a friend of yours."

Gilded George broke into a light laugh. "My friend, did you say, Dolph?" he exclaimed. "Why, bless you, this fellow would give his head almost for a fair chance at mine."

"Then we are in the same boat. He hates us both."

"Doubtless. When did you come to town?"

"A little while before they told me about the young man's arrival."

"You did not see him come?"

"No. I—"

Dolph checked himself. It would not do to tell this man that he had visited the Padre 'Selmo. He did not know who Gilded George was, nor what had brought him to San Tonquin.

"Ah! I understand," observed Gilded George with a smile. "You were in San Tonquin when the dead man came, but not at a public place."

San Diego Dolph did not speak. To open his mouth would be to utter a lie in which he might be instantly caught.

"Weren't you at one Father 'Selmo's?" asked Gilded George. "Come, Dolph! don't try to pull the wool over my eyes."

San Diego Dolph broke from the hand that rested on his shoulder and started back with a light exclamation of surprise.

"You're no court!" he cried. "I'm not obliged to tell you where I've been. By Jupiter! I won't!"

One step carried Gilded George toward the astonished sport. His eyes did not glisten now; they flashed, but his voice was peculiarly calm.

"Don't go into a flash," he said, even smiling while he spoke. "We may become friends. I see nothing to prevent. The bonanza you want to find is big enough for two."

A thrill went like a cold lance to Dolph's heart. The secret was out, and Gilded George's mission was the lost Spanish mine!

"You understand me, San Diego," he went on; "you know exactly what I mean when I say that the bonanza is big enough for two. I talk about the Padre's Palace when I speak as I do. Ain't you the man who met the vultures on the Texan plain?"

"I'm the very man!" confessed Dolph through close-set teeth. "Do you know me?"

"No. I don't know that we ever met before to-night. A little girl saw you in a dream, in

New York; she saw the vultures swoop down upon you."

"And the rescue?" queried Dolph.

"No. The horror of the attack unnerved her. But I am not here to talk about these things. You have been to 'Selmo's?"

"Yes."

The word was spoken without the least effort on the speaker's part.

"Did you get any information?"

"Not a bit."

"It is my turn to try," announced Gilded George, smiling. "Show me where this padre lives. Remember! the bonanza is big enough for two."

"I'll do it!" ejaculated Dolph. "But let me tell you two things: the padre knows, and he is as stout as Hercules."

The two men went back into the town, and Dolph guided the strange sport to the door of 'Selmo's hut.

Gilded George rapped, but there was no answer; then he lifted the latch and opened the door. The lamp was still burning above the little table, and its light illumined every portion of the room.

Here and there things were in confusion.

"Too late!" cried San Diego. "The crucifix on the wall is gone!"

"Yes, too late! The sole guardian of the big secret has run away!"

CHAPTER IV.

A MAN-HUNTER AT FAULT.

"If I had not been called away to face that charge of murder, this would not have happened," grated San Diego, glaring at the displaced articles which confirmed the little padre's flight.

Gilded George said nothing for a minute; then he turned slowly upon the speaker and spoke with a smile.

"Do you think 'Selmo has a grip on the Spanish secret?"

"There's no doubt of it. He gave the whole thing away when he saw the paper I produced, and then he told me."

"We must find the padre," decided Gilded George firmly.

"We will do nothing else. Here's my hand on it!"

The two men grasped hands in the light of the little lamp, but the next moment Dolph withdrew his fingers.

"Jehu! is your hand always that cold?" he exclaimed.

"It is," smiled the other.

"If there's a colder grip in the world than yours, I'd like to know who owns it. You ought to have a name for that bloodless hand."

"I have. I am called Captain Coldgrip!"

"That's appropriate! But this isn't findin' Father 'Selmo."

"It is losing time where nothing is to be gained," was the reply. "I am convinced now that the little padre is the guardian of the secret which has been a secret for two hundred years. It is singular that we should come to San Tonquin on the same night, and the same errand. It is strange, too, that I should find the man who was dreamed about by a little girl in New York—the man lashed to a horse and sent out among the vultures of the Texas plains. Who served you that trick, San Diego?"

"The coolest and most merciless red devil that ever lived!" hissed Dolph. "He is on the gold trail now, and a dozen blooded hounds, some white, others red, are at his heels. They caught me unawares, and when they searched me and found on my person evidences of my bonanza hunt, Injun Nick had me tied to the horse. Then they choked me till I fainted, and when I came to I was on a burned plain, alone, with nothing in sight. As a matter of course, I suffered a thousand deaths, and the vultures came. Their beaks and claws began on me at once, and in the despair of the moment I broke my bonds and fought them back. If an Apache had not come up at the right moment the winged demons would have won the battle for all. You don't think I like this Injun Nick, do you? Stand him before me anywhere, and at any time, and let me show you how I adore the coppery-faced tiger!"

"The time will come if we stick together, Dolph," said Gilded George, now known as our old acquaintance, Captain Coldgrip, the New York detective. "I have a slight acquaintance with Injun Nick, and it will give me pleasure to renew it at any time. But the padre first, if we can find him right away. Do you know San Tonquin well?"

"Never was here till to-night. It has two padres; I know that."

"Yes. Cortez, a young man, is the other."

"Do you think Father 'Selmo went to him?"

"No. They are not on the best terms. Cortez is 'one of the boys,' when it is not a fast-day. 'Selmo was his opposite. Let me play a single-handed game here for a while. Go back to the Red Lizard, as the hotel is called, and see that the young man lying dead on the porch gets a decent burial."

Dolph drew back reluctantly.

"Who is that young fellow?" he asked.

"Not now; some other time," answered Coldgrip, significantly. "Let me conduct the search alone for the little priest. If we should meet in the presence of any one in San Tonquin, remember that you have never seen me—we are strangers!"

"You can bet your life on San Diego Dolph's play, captain," said the sport. "Do you want to be left here?"

"If you please."

In a moment Captain Coldgrip was alone in the padre's hut.

"I can read men pretty well, I think," he murmured. "I have made no mistake to-night. Estelle would be surprised to know that I have found the man she saw in a dream, and very sorry to hear who lies dead at the Red Lizard. San Diego Dolph played a fast hand on Padre 'Selmo—a little too fast, but a man will do something basty for a bonanza as rich as the Padre Palace Mine. I don't like this running away. The old padre may have a hiding-place which cannot be found by the keenest sleuths. What did I promise Colonel Cantwell the night I left his office on Broadway?—that I would find the lost bonanza! And I made the child, Estelle, a promise, too. Alas! I can never keep it. Now, Father 'Selmo, Captain Coldgrip turns to you!"

We do not intend to follow the detective in his thorough search of the padre's hut. Nothing escaped him. He climbed into the dark little garret, and searched every inch of its lightless space. He searched the floor for a trap-door, but found none.

The padre did not have any use for traps and things of like import.

"The mummy of San Tonquin is not in his tomb—that is certain," concluded the detective, giving up the hunt in the hut. "There is another place to be searched; after that, still another."

He left the hut and went to the front of the little church. The door, always unlocked, seemed to invite entrance, for it stood slightly ajar.

Captain Coldgrip went in.

The Church of San Tonquin was not the counterpart of the cathedrals of Santa Fe. It was small and dark, and the detective's footsteps seemed to awaken a score of weird echoes.

Match in hand, he moved everywhere with the stealth of the cat; he scrutinized the little altar and tried to find a trap-door leading to some mysteries beneath.

"The third and last place," muttered Coldgrip.

Five minutes later a fine-looking young girl, with deep black eyes and a faultless figure, opened the front door of one of the houses of San Tonquin, and started back from the person who confronted her.

"What is it, sir!" she asked, gazing into her visitor's face.

"I want to see you for a moment," was the reply.

"Come in."

The girl led the man into a small room illumined by a lamp, and turned upon him with a question in her brilliant eyes.

"I am looking for Father 'Selmo," announced the visitor, taking a step forward as he spoke.

"Why do you come here?"

"It is the third and last place."

"Then you have looked in—"

The young woman caught herself and stopped.

"Yes, I have looked into the hut and the church. He is not there. Now I have come to his ward—to the Flower of San Tonquin."

The figure of the girl seemed to increase in stature. Her eyes suddenly took on a new brilliance.

"You have come to the wrong place," she said calmly. "Father 'Selmo is not here."

Captain Coldgrip saw that truth was in every word as it was spoken by the beautiful creature before him.

"If it is my turn to question, I would like to know who you are?" the Flower of San Tonquin continued. "You seem acquainted with my identity; you call me the flower of this place, also Padre 'Selmo's ward. The priest has no claim on me. My religion is not his; yet, for all this, you come here to find him. Who are you?"

"Gilded George for the present," the captain replied.

"You have two names. I see."

"Is that unusual here?"

"No. Fifty men of San Tonquin have two and even three names. So you are Gilded George when it does not suit you to be some one else?"

The detective could not suppress a smile.

"You are Gilded George and you want the Mummy of San Tonquin," the girl continued. "I would almost wager my life that you are hunting for the Padre's Palace."

Captain Coldgrip started, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Ah! I would have won!" cried the girl with a laugh. "Every now and then somebody comes here for that purpose, as if San Tonquin was the door to the lost bonanza. Some people imagine that the Mummy holds the secret because of his great age."

"Prove to my satisfaction that he does not!" cried the detective leaning forward.

"What? are you one of the dupes, too?" was the quick retort. "The country must be full of them."

"Full or not, I know that the Spanish bonanza is no myth, and that the little padre knows more about it than he will ever tell without coercion."

The girl's eyes instantly flashed, and she took a sudden step forward.

"And you would coerce the Mummy, would you, Gilded George?" she exclaimed. "You would hunt the little padre down and torture him for what he may not know? Don't tell this to San Tonquin; don't go to the veranda of the Red Lizard and proclaim your intentions in a loud voice."

"Why not?" ventured the detective.

"Selmo is the heart of San Tonquin," was the answer. "When you touch him you cock every revolver and loosen every bowie in the town. There is a story, or a prophecy, to the effect that with the Mummy's life departs the luck of San Tonquin. I don't believe such things; but there are two hundred desperate men here who do."

"Has anybody ever touched 'Selmo'?"

"Yes. A man tried to rob him, three months ago."

"Well?"

"They hung him before the Red Lizard before morning!"

"Who was he?"

"A big man with Indian blood in his veins."

"Of what did he want to rob Father 'Selmo'?"

"Of the secret of the Spanish bonanza!" smiled the young girl.

"Ah! they all think he guards it!"

"What do you think?"

"I never think," was the strange answer.

"Then by Jove! you know!" cried the detective.

The Flower of San Tonquin recoiled as if she expected a spring from the man before her; but Coldgrip kept his station in the middle of the little room and looked sharply at her.

All at once the door behind him opened and he saw by the sudden change of the girl's color that the visitor was not welcome, just then.

Captain Coldgrip wheeled and the first sight of the person in the doorway caused him to start.

"Oh! I see I'm in the wrong box," said the visitor, who was a stalwart man with steely gray eyes, a big mustache and dressed in garments plentifully adorned with silver lace and gold buttons. "I didn't intend to intrude, Miss Gerta. I am just back from Sante Fe, and, as I promised to call at once, I have come. Pardon the intrusion. I am off!" the door shut and the man was gone.

Gone! but with a farewell look at Captain Coldgrip which told that he would, in the future, solicit a further acquaintance.

"That is Gold Chick," explained the girl.

"Your friend?"

"My friend whether I will it or not," she answered, with a smile. "He is one of those men whose best years have been given to a hunt for the Padre's Palace. Gold Chick has not left a stone unturned. If he should suspect your mission, Gilded George—"

"What would happen?" asked the detective eagerly.

Before the girl could reply a loud whoop came in from the street; it was followed by another and another.

"Indians!" exclaimed the Flower of San Tonquin. "They burst in upon us every now and then. Don't you want to see them? Come! they must be near us now."

Coldgrip followed the girl to the front door and she held it open for him to pass out.

As he reached the step a dozen steeds ridden by Indians dashed by in a cloud of moonlit dust, and with genuine Apache yells.

The next moment he felt his wrist grasped by fingers that closed about it like the claws of an eagle and he was drawn aside.

"I've been waiting for you, pard," said a voice at Coldgrip's ear. "If I haven't lost my sight our old enemy, Injun Nick, is in town!"

The speaker was San Diego Dolph.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE RED LIZARD.

A FEELING akin to a thrill took possession of the New York detective. He looked down into Dolph's face with an amazed stare.

"When did you see the man you call Injun Nick?" he asked.

"Not twenty minutes ago. I ought to know the scoundrel who lashed me to the horse and sent me to the vultures. I had a chance to cash his chips at death's counter, but I want you to see him first."

Coldgrip looked back toward the door, but it was shut and the Flower of San Tonquin was gone.

"Come along, then," he said, impetuously. "I failed to find the padre, but, never mind—he will not always be lost. We will have to content ourselves for the present with Injun Nick."

The two men walked rapidly toward the Red Lizard Hotel, which, standing on one side of a

small square or plaza, was the most notorious resort in town.

Every prominent event happened in or before the Red Lizard, which was kept by a New Mexican called Major Miguel.

This man was not without a history which embraced half a dozen duels and wilder escapades; he had roughed it from Shasta to the land of the Montezumas, and more than one person had wondered why he had settled down in San Tonquin.

It is true that rumor had placed the mouth of the lost Spanish Mine in the vicinity of the town, but a dozen other places enjoyed the same report, and there seemed to be nothing striking in San Tonquin's favor.

Legend and story had combined to make this old mine one of fabulous riches. There was no limit to the wealth that lay hidden in its dark recesses. Men had hunted for it with a perseverance that deserved success, and for fifty years the main trails of New Mexico and the great Southwest had been made for the Padre's Palace.

Gerta, the Flower of San Tonquin, uttered a truth when she told Captain Coldgrip that more than one citizen of the town had the great secret for the goal of his life.

Desperadoes, miners and cowboys discussed the lost mine on the Red Lizard's veranda or in the saddle on the plains. A thousand calculations of its riches had been made, and the richest dividends imaginable had been struck—always on paper!

If Major Miguel, the proprietor of the Red Lizard, was one of the mine-hunters, he had many a companion near at hand.

The detective and San Diego Dolph were not long in reaching the plaza.

The Indians who had ridden, in a cloud of dust, past Gerta's house, had reached it before them, and the two men saw a number of horses in the plaza.

"The Apache hounds have stopped," said Dolph with a glance at the detective. "I hate Indians as I hate water. That's only one good one and he ar' the red what took me from the vultures."

"What was his name?"

"Wizard Dick. That is his white name: half of these Indians have two names, you know. I haven't seen him since he helped me when I needed it."

Coldgrip and Dolph kept in the shadow of the houses and trees of the plaza and edged their way toward the Red Lizard.

A boisterous crowd swarmed in front of the hotel, and the two pards heard the coarse language of white men and the jargon of the Apaches.

Major Miguel had hung a lamp with a reflector on the porch, and by this means the crowd and the Indian horses were seen.

The New York detective noticed the arrowy figures of the half-naked pests of the Southwest. He saw them glide hither and thither, perfectly free and fearless, among the men who would have cut their throats at the drop of a sombrero.

More than one cowboy had lost his cattle by an Apache raid, and doubtless the present visit to San Tonquin was but a diversion to cover some fresh deviltry.

"That's our man!" suddenly said Dolph to Coldgrip, and his finger pointed toward the Red Lizard.

More than a hundred men red and white were in sight at that moment, but the detective, looking over Dolph's finger, saw the one he had singled out.

A large man with an Indian face, and partly civilized garments, stood squarely in the light of Major Miguel's lamp.

He leaned coolly against one of the wooden pillars of the veranda which was raised three feet above the plaza level and was gazing at the animated scene before him.

Captain Coldgrip leaned forward with eagerness; his gaze became fastened on the man on the porch.

"Isn't it Injun Nick?" asked San Diego Dolph impatiently.

"Injun Nick or his twin!" the detective asserted.

"It is the arch devil himself," exclaimed Dolph. "He has no twin; there isn't another like him in existence! What do you think fetched him to San Tonquin to-night?"

"Can't you guess?"

"If he wrote the accusation the corpse brought he has come to see what effect it had," was the answer. "The dead body has been taken away, and anybody can tell him that I was acquitted. I don't care what brought him here. I am going to pay him forever for my ride across the Texan plain," and Captain Coldgrip saw the heavy six shooter in Dolph's hand.

"Great Caesar! did you ever see such a target, captain?" Dolph went on, his eyes blazing as he watched the Indian.

"He may have come with some of his band?"

"What do I care if he fetched every devil of them along? I feel the vultures at me this very moment, and the fire that burned my throat that infernal day is thar again!"

Up went the revolver before the detective could interfere.

"This is the play of your last Mazeppa!" hissed Dolph. "Lost in Texas—found in San Tonquin!"

"Not just yet!" exclaimed Captain Coldgrip, and Dolph saw a hand clutch the revolver. "Injun Nick's trail may lead us to the doors of the Padre's Palace. Let us watch the red ratter for a while."

"And take the chances?" said Dolph wheeling upon the detective.

"And take the chances!" was the echo.

"I don't believe in that. Let that Indian go to-night and he may show up with a cold deck when he isn't looked for. He— By Jove! the game is gone already!"

Coldgrip looked toward the hotel and saw that Injun Nick had suddenly and rather mysteriously disappeared.

"What's your man now?" asked Dolph, with a scowl. "Don't you see he has the slippery qualities of the eel? You must not give that fellow an inch of string. He will take a lasso's length if you do."

"For the present I am willing he shall have it."

The two watched the crowd for a few minutes, but the Indian did not come back to his pillar.

All at once the whole assembly began to move toward the Red Lizard.

"What does that mean?" asked Dolph.

"Somebody's treat," suggested the other.

"That's more than I kin stand. I'm as dry as a fish, captain."

Coldgrip smiled.

"But you wouldn't go to the Red Lizard's bar just now for a drink?" he asked.

"Wouldn't I? Wait for me here, captain."

And before the detective could detain him he was off and was crossing the plaza with the bravado of a lion.

"Some men are born fools," murmured Coldgrip, as he watched the vanishing figure. "If that one meets Injun Nick, as he is likely to, somebody will get killed in a flash. He sha'n't invade the lion's cage alone. I have made that man my pard, and, fool or sage, I intend to stand by him."

Reaching his hand into an inside pocket, the detective produced a full beard, which he clapped upon his face, and thus entirely changed his appearance.

Dolph had already vanished, and the bar-room of the Red Lizard was full and overflowing.

The porch also was pretty well crowded, and the detective saw that only a deep pocket could stand treat for the whole thirsty set.

He saw nothing of San Diego Dolph when he reached the veranda.

In all probability, that individual had edged his way into the bar-room, and at that moment might be standing face to face with Injun Nick.

The detective caught one of the pillars and swung himself lightly upon the porch. Nobody had seen him.

An eager crowd was before the door, and a dozen men were cursing and laughing at their own efforts to get into the Red Lizard's bar-room.

"The Indians are all inside," muttered the captain. "If there is a scheme in this it seems to be working well. San Tonquin and the ranchers may be going to get even."

The next moment the light of the veranda lamp suddenly grew dim, and the detective who looked quickly saw a hand drop away from it.

"There is something in the wind," he said to himself. "I believe that San Tonquin is really going to measure devilment with the Apaches."

The last word was still unexpressed when a man swung himself upon the porch just as the captain had done, a moment before. Coldgrip looked at the agile fellow and saw the figure of a giant in the dim light. Not more than three feet separated them.

"Great heavens! it is Injun Nick!" and the detective's hand moved toward the revolver on his hip.

Yes, the famous red fox was before him and within touching distance! One thing was certain now—San Diego Dolph would not encounter him in the bar-room. The light on the porch was not sufficient to show objects with distinctness; the Indian horses, left in the square in charge of a buck or two, had become a solid mass.

Suddenly Injun Nick took a step toward the detective.

"San Tonquin is going to spring a trap," he said in Captain Coldgrip's face. "Go out on the plaza, and when you hear a yell in the bar-room shoot the guards of the horses. We must help San Tonquin a little to-night; it is policy."

Injun Nick stopped abruptly.

"Excuse me—the wrong man!" he exclaimed, for not until then did the Indian discover that he was not addressing a person whom he did not know.

He turned away with no further apology, and without seeing that he had talked to his greatest foe. A smile came to the detective's lips, and his dark eyes gleamed mischievously.

He saw Injun Nick touch a man who stood near the door—the right man this time.

Injun Nick talked rapidly and in low tones for a moment, and a man jumped from the porch and glided toward the horses.

Captain Coldgrip held his breath and waited.

"I don't know what bearing this San Tonquin play will have on my mission, but I will wait and see," he murmured.

He did not have long to wait, for, all at once, a loud whoop sounded in the bar-room, and then came the thrilling noises of a sudden assault.

The detective turned toward the horses in the plaza, and the following instant two revolver-shots rung out clearly and the Indian steeds started by the reports and several piercing yells went thundering through the town!

All this did not seem to occupy the quarter of a minute.

A struggling mass of humanity was now before the door of the Red Lizard, and from the bar-room came wild yells and oaths of devilish triumph. It seemed as if Major Miguel's place had been transformed into pandemonium.

Captain Coldgrip could not see what had happened beyond the door, but San Diego Dolph, who had reached the trap, had witnessed the springing.

He had heard the signal whoop, and had seen three desperadoes leap simultaneously, like three tigers, at each Apache's throat.

For once the red Bedouins of the Southwest border had been taken unawares, and before they could lift a hand, a crowd of yelling men were thrusting cocked revolvers into their faces.

San Tonquin was destined to have a memorable night.

CHAPTER VI.

SAN TONQUIN JUSTICE.

THE tumult and the triumph within momentarily increased; the crowd on the veranda drew back, while those inside appeared on the porch.

Captain Coldgrip, glued to the spot by curiosity, as it were, soon saw the cause of the tumult.

Nine Indians were prisoners in the hands of the mob; they were powerless and beyond the pale of mercy.

Nearly one hundred yelling men were demanding their blood, and the detective wondered that the reds had not been shot to pieces.

The horses were gone, and only one of the guards had been shot by the man selected by Injun Nick for that purpose.

"I can't say that I pity an Apache," muttered Captain Coldgrip, "but these poor devils will not be treated with a show of decency. San Tonquin considers that its time has come, and the sports are going to make the best of it."

In less time than one can pen a line, the prisoners were dragged across the porch and toward a tree whose huge limbs at noonday shaded a good portion of the plaza. The lamp, which some one had turned down just before the attack, was burning with its full brilliancy again, and revealed the exciting scenes.

Where was San Diego Dolph?

"Captain, can't we help Wizard Dick?" suddenly said a voice at the detective's elbow.

Dolph had come back.

"Is your rescuer among the prisoners?" he asked, looking into the sport's face.

"That's just whar he is. I saw what war coming before the trap was sprung, and I tried to warn the young buck, but failed. I owe my life to that Injun. He saved me from the vultures. Can't we help him, captain?"

"I'm afraid not, Dolph."

"By the eternal! they sha'n't rope him!" grated the sport.

"Are they going to do that?"

"They intend to swing every mother's son of them from that tree."

"For what crime?"

"For a dozen, I reckon," was the reply. "I'm not here to say that an Apache doesn't deserve death when caught, but one o' the nine yonder saved my life."

"What would you do? We can't fight San Tonquin; and besides, the lost mine is to be found!"

Dolph did not reply, but turned to the crowd which had reached the tree with the speechless reds.

"Hang it all! What's an Injun ag'in' a billion?" Coldgrip heard him ejaculate.

And then, looking into the detective's face, he continued:

"I reckon you're right, captain. We can't help the 'Pache."

From the moment of their capture the Indians had not uttered a word, and now they stood sullen and silent under the lyncher's tree, and saw several men with ropes in their hands crawling along the limbs overhead.

Soon there came from the Red Lizard a heavily-built man who had a very important air. He looked about forty-five years old, and under his snappy little eyes he wore a curling mustache and pointed goatee.

This person was Major Miguel, the well-known proprietor of the Red Lizard, and second in importance to no one in San Tonquin.

"Gentlemen," he said, halting at the crowd and attracting attention by his sonorous voice—

"gentlemen, as a man who respects human life, I wish to enter a protest against these summary proceedings. I don't say that every Apache devil shouldn't be strung up without mercy, but there should be a form in this instance. Remember that we are under the Government of the United States, with whom the Apaches just now are at peace, and that we have courts of law—"

"Oh, cut it short, major!" roared some one, and a boisterous laugh drowned the speaker's sentence.

Just then several large men in dark shirts and sombreros caught him from behind and carried him back.

"Thanks, boys," said Major Miguel. "I had to make a show of good order—that was all. Now go on with the hanging!"

Coldgrip heard these words, and the next moment he saw the proprietor of the Red Lizard going back to the hotel.

"The hypocrite ought to be followed and choked!" he said to himself. "This is the way they do things here. An Indian is no better than a dog."

Major Miguel had quickened his steps and vanished, and a loud voice called the detective back to the scene beneath the tree.

"Form a circle thar, men ov Tonquin!" said the voice. "We ar' goin' ter depopulate ther Apache nation ter some extent. Death ter ther hoss-thieves an' cattle robbers ov ther Southwest ranches!"

This was received with a yell which told how intense was the hatred of the San Tonquin sports.

In a little while a circle was formed about the doomed Indians. It was a circle, at any part of which the revolver or the bowie was visible.

The New York Shadow went forward. He was curious to see the swift vengeance of the men who had doubtless suffered much at the hands of the Apache nation. Injun Nick was not to be seen, and San Diego Dolph had glided away some time before.

The chief master of the thrilling ceremonies was a man who had attracted Captain Coldgrip's attention from the first for he had recognized him as Gold Chick, the man he had met at Gerta's home.

The Indians had been placed under a huge bough ample enough to bear their combined weight. With cool cruelty one hand only had been secured to the body; the other had been left free to tug at the rope when it had performed its office, so that the crowd could laugh at the struggles of the doomed.

"Send for the Mummy of San Tonquin!" cried some. "Give the reds a chance for ther sweet by-an'-by!"

A laugh of course replied to this suggestion and Captain Coldgrip wondered if Father Selmo would be sent for.

"They don't need any passports," said Gold Chick. "The men under the limb will fix the nooses and step back. I will then count five, and at the fifth number the gentlemen at the ropes will pull away."

The next moment the Indians were partly hidden by the men who began to adjust the nooses with alacrity.

It was the thrilling moment.

"San Diego Dolph must pity Wizard Dick just now," murmured the detective. "The young buck who saved him from the vultures—"

The detective was checked by a yell that seemed to freeze his blood, and all at once the men at the nooses fell back and gripped their revolvers.

"Stand firm! One Injun is loose!" exclaimed Gold Chick.

"An' he's got a gun!" said some one else in equally startling tones.

The next second the excitement was unbounded: revolvers clicked everywhere.

Suddenly there flashed a six-shooter under the tree of death, and in startling succession it was succeeded by three shots more!

A man fell at each shot and then cries of "Shoot the red!" "Save him for the rope!" and others were everywhere heard.

The crowd closed and made a dash toward the tree. Captain Coldgrip saw it come in contact with several Indians who were swinging between heaven and earth, and afterward recede with curses of disappointment.

"Come! I've done my part for to-night," said a voice at the detective's side.

"What have you done, Dolph?"

"I gave Wizard Dick a chance, and he took it, bet yer life! Let's get out o' this right away. It won't be healthy for me if they find me here. Jehu! didn't he give the graveyard three orders on death in quick time!"

The detective was almost dragged away by the man who spoke thus.

"Now tell me what you did?" he said, when they had reached a certain distance from the tree.

"Nothing but this," said Dolph, with a grin. "I got the job ov adjusting the rope for Wizard Dick. In less than a second I had told him who I was, and while I fooled with ther noose I nudged my six-shooter ag'in' him, and he took the hint. Quick as a flash he had it in his hand, and then came that play that startled San Tonquin. Wasn't it a daisy trick, captain? San

Diego Dolph Couldn't stand back and see Wizard Dick stretch hemp after what he did in Texas."

Coldgrip gave the speaker an admiring look. "Did only one Indian escape?" he asked.

"No; three got away," was the answer. "There are three cyclones saving for San Tonquin in the near future, and Wizard Dick is the boss of the lot. It's all quiet up there now. They'll go back to the Red Lizard and drink in silence."

Coldgrip looked toward the plaza and saw no disturbance there.

Calm had succeeded the storm, and the bronze pards had only partially revenged themselves.

"Shall we resume the hunt for the padre?" asked Dolph. "You did not find him at Gerta's. What did she say?"

"She declared he was not there."

"The girl won't lie!"

"Aha! Then you know her? I thought you told me this was your first visit to San Tonquin?"

"So it is; but the girl is not unknown to me. I was Jack Javert when Injun Nick and his pards sent me to the vultures. I can tell you as much about the Flower of San Tonquin as any man in it; but not just now, captain. I—"

"Hark!" interrupted the detective, and then he stepped forward and threw up his right hand.

"I see you as if it was noonday," he continued. "Come forward with hands up, or take the consequences!"

In another moment a figure advanced and San Diego Dolph uttered a cry of recognition and sprung forward.

"This is my Apache, captain—this is Wizard Dick!" he exclaimed, showing off the lithe form of the young Indian whom he forced forward.

"He accepted the odds awhile ago and sailed in for the biggest stake any game ever saw—life itself. Ain't he a daisy, though? I don't like a drop of Injun blood, but hang me, if thar ain't something about this buck that will never make San Diego Dolph his foe. We might make a second Injun Nick out o' him. He ain't a Hercules like Nick, but he's quicker nor a lynx."

The Apache's eyes still glistened with the excitement he had just passed through, and the detective may have wondered for a moment if there was not something in Dolph's suggestion.

It would be difficult to find a foil for Injun Nick, and Wizard Dick physically did not impress Captain Coldgrip in the light in which he was viewed by Dolph.

"The white man did not forget," said the young Apache, glancing at San Diego Dolph, as he drew his arrowy figure to its full height. "Wizard Dick will never forget the red night in the white hangers' town."

The Indian spoke bitterly and with spirit, and at the conclusion he looked with tigerish eyes toward the plaza, as if he would go back there for vengeance.

"Wizard Dick has brought his white brother the gun that kills," he went on, handing Dolph a revolver. "Where he lives there are many like it."

"Keep it," said Dolph, pushing the weapon away. "You may need it before you're out o' San Tonquin."

The Apache resolutely shook his head.

"Is this a brother, white face?" he asked, turning to Captain Coldgrip.

"He is Dolph's pard and it is no secret, Wizard Dick, that we are on the same trail," was the answer. "You've heard about the Padre's Palace Mine. That's what we're after, like fifty others. We had a grip on the secret a little while ago."

"What grip?" asked the young Indian quickly.

"We had our feet at the door of the lost bonanza, but when the Mummy of San Tonquin slipped through our fingers we lost the play."

Wizard Dick said nothing, but looked again toward the plaza.

Captain Coldgrip, who was watching the Apache closely, saw a new light in his eyes.

"Do you know Injun Nick?" asked the detective.

"The Indian outlaw? Wizard Dick knows him well," was the reply. "He is back there. He played a silent hand to-night. Wizard Dick saw him more than once. He will go back and see if the eagles of the Apaches are dead."

"Not back thar!" exclaimed San Diego Dolph in a voice of fear. "Maybe we'll pit you ag'in' that Injun some day and—"

"Your buck is gone," said the detective.

Sure enough, Wizard Dick had vanished and Dolph bit his lip to find himself deserted so cleverly.

"What will he do?" asked Captain Coldgrip.

"Do?" was the echo. "I sha'n't attempt to guess. If he finds the six Apaches under the tree he's liable to walk into the Red Lizard and kill everybody in sight. That Injun is a daddy dollar!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE GRIP OF INJUN NICK.

"CAN you spare a few moments, major?"

"All you want."

"I don't want many."

"Then come this way."

The last speaker was Major Miguel, the proprietor of the Red Lizard, and a minute afterward he had ushered his questioner, an Indian in half-civilized garments, into a small room not far from the bar of the hotel.

There was a latent gleam of curiosity in Injun Nick's eyes, and when the major had closed the door he said quickly:

"How long have you been here?"

Major Miguel almost started at the eagerness displayed by the red-skin's voice.

"I wonder if this fellow knows me," passed like a flash through his mind. "He has been to San Tonquin once or twice before, but this is the first time he ever troubled me. Injun Nick they call him. A man with a history and a mission, I'll bet my head. He'll find Major Miguel no fool if he is going to play a fancy hand."

Then he looked into the Indian's face and replied to the interrogative.

"I've been one of the fixtures of San Tonquin about ten years," he said.

Injun Nick leaned forward, seemingly satisfied.

"Ten years?" he echoed.

"That's the size of it," smiled the major.

"You built this hotel, eh?"

"Had it built and called it the Red Lizard because we found a lizard of that color in a stone near where it stands. Quite appropriate, wasn't it?"

Injun Nick paid no attention to the last remark, but threw a quick glance toward the door.

"We're safe here," said the major, catching the swift glance. "I don't permit any spies around the Red Lizard. Then Apaches we strung up to-night ain't prowling 'round, I guess."

"Six of them will never steal any more," said Injun Nick, and the next moment he was within three feet of the major. "Look here," he went on. "You have been here ten years, you say. What have you ever heard about the old Spanish bonanza?"

Major Miguel uttered an exclamation of surprise and almost bounded from his chair.

"What! are you after it, too?" he cried.

Injun Nick's eyes glistened.

"I am after it!" he said, and his dark hand fell upon the major's arm and closed there. "I am another of the fools; the most of them have been white men, but I am not the only Injun who has sought this trail. I know that the mine has an existence; that its secret is in the possession of one of three padres who inhabit this country."

"That is more than I know," said Major Miguel.

"One padre out of the three holds the key to the Padre's Palace," continued Injun Nick. "I have found two of them within the past six months, and have convinced myself that they know nothing. What are your padres like? You have two, I am told?"

"Two," said Major Miguel, almost mechanically.

"What are their ages?"

"Padre Cortez is thirty-five, and 'Selmo nearly one hundred."

"Is he the person called the Mummy of San Tonquin?"

"Yes."

"Will you show me his hut?"

The owner of the Red Lizard hesitated.

What! show this bonanza-hunter the hut of Father 'Selmo! The Indian had betrayed himself; he was hunting the lost mine and doubtless had proof that the old priest knew something about it.

"If you do not care to show me, I will find it for myself," he said to the hesitating major. "I do not say that this is the lucky padre of the three, but I want to see him, that is all."

Major Miguel looked into the red-skin's eyes.

"If this Indian knows something, he did not come here without documents of some kind. I'll bet my head that he carries a map or a chart of the Padre's Palace Mine next to his coppery skin, and if he should find 'Selmo, he may play a game bigger than Satan's best. I've had an eye on the bonanza for years, and it has been said, though I never took much stock in it, that 'Selmo has a grip on the secret. Can I beat this Indian? I've played dandy hands before to-night, and if I have been keeping hotel ten years, I haven't lost my head."

"This is all," said Injun Nick, leaving the chair which he had taken. "I merely wanted to ask you several questions. This bonanza is for the person who finds it."

"I know that, but where did you first hear of it?"

"Where?" smiled the red rattler. "In the wigwam of my tribe. I have heard of it in a thousand places. When I was the Scarlet Hercules in one of your big cities in the East, I heard men talking about it. I once had papers that told about the Padre's Palace, but I was robbed. I got others afterward by accident."

Major Miguel started visibly. The red-skin had important papers, and of course they were on his person! The thought fairly electrified him.

"Who robbed you?" he asked.

"Never mind—I was robbed!" said Injun Nick through clinched teeth. "I will now go down and find the Mummy. It is every man for himself in this game, major. The best one wins."

The little lamp on the table showed Major Miguel the glittering eyes of the Indian; he saw triumph everywhere in them, and his blood seemed to boil. Injun Nick went toward the door watched like a hawk by the keeper of the Red Lizard.

"I can get out of Padre 'Selmo what he wants," he said to himself. "If I let this infernal red-skin get the best of me, I deserve to join the six Apaches in the plaza. He sha'n't do it!"

The next second the hand of the Indian touched the latch, and for a moment his eyes were removed from the major. That one moment was enough.

All at once the owner of the Red Lizard stepped back and whipped out a six-shooter.

The click of the lock made the Indian turn.

"You are right, Indian Nick. It is every man for himself in this game," said Major Miguel. "A man has to play quick sometimes, and the present time is of that sort. I want the papers you referred to last—the ones pertaining to the Spanish bonanza. You will not go to Padre 'Selmo to-night. I'll not make it necessary. The Padre's Palace Mine may be five hundred miles from San Tonquin, and the Red Lizard may stand directly over it—who knows? Put your hand under your shirt and produce the documents! Don't tell me that you haven't anything of that kind on your anatomy. I know better. Fork 'em over!"

The major spoke from behind a revolver which completely covered the Indian, who for once in his life had been taken by surprise. He stood erect and flashing-eyed by the door, and told the major by his mien that the most trifling breach of vigilance might cost him his life.

"You want what I haven't got," said the Indian.

"I want the documents; you have them!"

"What documents?"

"The ones you got by accident after the robbery you spoke of. Those documents bear on the lost bonanza, and I want them!"

"Don't play fool, Major Miguel of the Red Lizard," said the Indian. "I have no papers on my person. The ones I got are in my head. If your revolver can shoot them out, and do you any good, blaze away!"

Major Miguel's hopes seemed to ooze out at his finger-ends.

He had played a desperately sudden hand, perhaps for nothing; he had transformed one of the coolest Indians living into an enemy. He began to wish he had curbed his patience, but it was too late now.

If he lowered the revolver Injun Nick might leap at him, and the dark-red hands might close on his throat.

The keeper of the Red Lizard did not know how to get rid of the bear he had caught.

"Maybe I had better kill the red," he ejaculated. "If I let up now I will have a new enemy, and one who may find the lost mine in the end. He came to San Tonquin alone to-night. The boys are making such a fuss in the bar-room below, that my revolver wouldn't be heard. If it should be, I can say that I shot the red in self-defense, and San Tonquin will never go back on Major Miguel."

The hotel-keeper gripped his revolver firmer than ever.

"The papers!" he said to the Indian. "Hand 'em over quick, or I'll blow your head off! This is San Tonquin, and the man before you is Major Miguel, late of Mexico."

Injun Nick seemed to see the white man's resolution in his eyes.

He shut his lips close, and gave him a yielding look. Then his hand moved to his breast.

"He has the documents, but I must kill him anyhow," said the major. "My motto is: 'Never give a rattlesnake his life!'"

The next instant something very unexpected took place. Instead of producing any papers, Injun Nick stooped suddenly, and leaped like a tiger at the keeper of the Red Lizard.

The revolver went off, but the bullet buried itself in the ceiling, and Major Miguel found himself caught and lifted from the floor in the twinkling of an eye!

"Whose game is it now?" laughed Injun Nick as he lowered the Red Lizard's proprietor and held him at arm's length in the lamplight. "I guess you wanted my life more than my papers, eh, Major Miguel? I repeat my assertion that it is every man for himself in this bonanza game, and Satan for us all! What do you want now—the documents still?"

Major Miguel was out of breath. The terrific charge of the Indian and the sudden turning of the tables had completely amazed him.

The Scarlet Hercules was quicker than a cat.

"The boys below didn't hear the report of your revolver, major," Injun Nick went on. "You could have shot me dead, and had things afterward your own way for a spell. Perhaps the idea entered your head, but now we'll see that it isn't carried out. I will find the Mummy of San Tonquin without Major Miguel for a

guide. I am going away, but you will remain here—you ought to know how! You have roughed it all your life, and you know what a game like this is between man and man!"

Major Miguel said nothing. Injun Nick suddenly transferred one hand to his prisoner's throat, and not a second too soon, for the owner of the Red Lizard had made up his mind to yell for help and abide the consequences.

Beneath the red hand that tightened where it touched, the major's face grew dark and his eyes seemed to start from their sockets.

The Indian bore him back over the stout little table and alongside the lamp that threw a glare over the startling scene. There was a cold glitter to Injun Nick's eyes.

In three minutes Major Miguel had ceased to struggle, and the red-skin took away his hand.

In one corner of the room was a low cot large enough for but one sleeper, and it soon held the body of the owner of the San Tonquin hotel.

Injun Nick took the lamp and held it over his face.

"I have sworn that nobody shall stand between me and the big mine and live!" he said in determined accents. "There may be a hundred trailers but Injun Nick will be the successful one. I was never beaten but once and that was by a man called Captain Coldgrip. I know that he left New York six months ago for the trail of the Padre's Palace. Woe to him if he meets me here!"

The Indian extinguished the lamp and went down the narrow stair, leaving Major Miguel on the cot in the darkness and silence of death.

The Red Lizard's owner had played a hasty and fatal hand.

Injun Nick avoided the bar-room and its boisterous crowd, and left the hotel unobserved.

"The padre lives behind his church. I will try the first one," he murmured.

A moment later Injun Nick was moving rapidly down the street, and all at once he dodged around the corner of Father 'Selmo's simple sanctuary.

"Heavens! that is Injun Nick," exclaimed a man who caught sight of the fitting figure. "I have a chance to cross arms with my old enemy once more. He is on the trail of the Spanish bonanza, sure enough. He won't find Padre 'Selmo at home. I will wait for him here and when he comes back I'll see whether he has forgotten his old friend Captain Coldgrip. And the speaker drew up against the wall of the little church and waited for his prey.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW SCHEME AFOOT.

MEANTIME, Gerta, the Flower of San Tonquin, was entertaining another visitor.

The man was Gold Chick, the handsome person who intruded upon her while she was facing Captain Coldgrip during his hunt for the little padre.

The girl had never liked the sport who made frequent trips to Santa Fe, and whose great hobby was the Spanish bonanza.

Gold Chick was not only handsome but passionate and fearless; to use the street language of San Tonquin, he "ran things" when he was there. He came back to Gerta with eagerness and rage strangely mingled in his deep black eyes, and his first words, snapped out tartly, told her that Gold Chick was in no good humor.

"Where is that man?" he asked.

"That man?" said the girl, showing a spirit that surprised the desperado.

"The stranger I found here with you awhile ago."

"He left when the Apaches rode into town."

"What did he call himself?"

"Gilded George."

This was a new name to Gold Chick.

"I'll bet my head that isn't his name!" he said.

"I don't know," said Gerta dryly. "I'll find out before morning if he stays in town! What did he want—the Padre's Palace, eh?"

The girl's start told Gold Chick that he had hit the mark.

"He was looking for the padre," she said.

"Father 'Selmo?"

"Yes."

"Nobody ever looks for Cortez," growled the sport. "He isn't supposed to know anything about the Spanish lay-out. They all want to see the Mummy of San Tonquin. Did he find 'Selmo here?"

"No."

"When did you see him last?"

"Not since yesterday."

"The Mummy is missing," said Gold Chick. "I went from here to his hut. Nearly everything is in confusion there as if the old fellow had run away."

"He would not do that," replied Gerta, with a smile.

"His little crucifix on the wall is gone. What does that mean, hey, my Tonquin rose?"

The girl turned slightly pale.

"I don't like that," she said. "He once told me that the disappearance of that crucifix would mean disaster."

"It means that or something else as important. No thief would take that, for it has no

value, and is dear to nobody but the Mummy himself. I tell you, Gerta, Father 'Selmo has ramosed the ranch. He has run away from San Tonquin, and why?"

The girl was silent.

"I'll tell you why," Gold Chick continued. "Some body is hot upon the bonanza trail. I don't know exactly who has frightened 'Selmo away, but he had one visitor at least to-night."

"Gilded George?"

"No, a man called San Diego Dolph, who was taken from the priest's hut on a charge of murder, which was fetched into town by a dead man hangin' across a horse. Strange, isn't it? Most infernal strange, I say! Well, since that man left the hut, nobody has seen the padre. He is gone, and the secret has gone off with him, and here I am stranded."

Gold Chick chewed his big mustache and began to walk the little room with the impatience and rage of a caged tiger.

Gerta watched him from under her long silk lashes of ebony, and wondered when and what would be his next outbreak.

"Did he ever tell you anything, girl?" suddenly cried Gold Chick, halting in front of the Flower of San Tonquin. "I mean, didn't the Mummy ever give you a clew to the secret? He came here often, and he told me once that you was to be richer than the queens of old, one of these days. He never put you onto the Spanish Mine, eh?"

"Father 'Selmo knew how to keep a secret when he had one," was the calm reply. "He never told me anything about the Padre's Palace."

"Not a word?" persisted Gold Chick, as if he thought the girl was deceiving him.

"Not a syllable. I never asked him if he was the guardian of the secret."

"Then you don't know what he meant when he told me that some day you would be richer than the queens across the sea?"

"I do not know."

Gold Chick drew back and resumed his restless strides, watched for a time by the girl.

"Bring me ink and paper," he said over his shoulder in tones of command.

Gerta left the room but soon returned with the desired articles which she placed on a little table up to which the sport drew a chair.

Dipping the pen into the ink he poised it above the little sheet before him and glanced at the Flower of San Tonquin.

"For the last time, Gerta, you don't know what has become of the cowed Mummy?" he said.

The eyes of the girl flashed with indignation. "My word used to be good, Gold Chick," she exclaimed. "When did it lose the impress of truth? I have answered your question before. I refuse to reply to the insinuation conveyed in its repetition."

"All right!" laughed the sport, as he turned to the paper. "I must be certain of some things, girl, and this is one of them."

He said no more but began to write, and when he paused the sheet contained these words:

"TO CAPTAIN DASH:—Father 'Selmo the Mummy of San Tonquin ran away to-night. He has left no trail, and the girl swears that she knows nothing. Sleep with one eye open. I shall not leave her until I have struck the Mummy's trail. Don't give up, the Spanish bonanza is no myth!"

"GOLD CHICK."

He folded this brief note and inclosed it in one of the envelopes Gerta had brought with the writing materials, after which he thrust it into an inner pocket and got up.

"I never write long letters, you see," he said with a smile and a look at the girl. "I can tell all I know in very few words. Now, having transacted the most important business, let me tell you what I discovered in Santa Fe."

"Ah! you are coming at last to something that interests me," exclaimed Gerta.

"I thought so," and Gold Chick came forward with a smile lurking under the ends of his mustache. "I made a thorough search of the papers I told you were there. I pumped Colonel Smilax, the unknown quantity, pretty dry. I fancy I got the best of the old fellow for one man."

"Well, what did he say?" inquired Gerta impatiently.

"Not a great deal. I believe him to be the person once called Jack Brown of Brown's Valley California."

"And my father?" cried the girl.

"Your fiddlesticks!" ejaculated Gold Chick. "Don't you know there were two Jack Browns of Brown's Valley? Your father is dead, and this is the other Jack, of course."

The girl's countenance fell.

"But what did he tell you?" she asked, faintly.

"Almighty little!" and then Gold Chick shut his shell like an oyster and became mute.

He looked like a man who, unguardedly, had gone too far, and he evidently censured himself for it.

But the girl was not to be beaten thus. She seemed to see that Gold Chick was keeping back something of interest to her welfare.

"But you will tell me what he said," she exclaimed, laying her hand on his arm. "You have promised to tell me everything. I hold

you to your word, Gold Chick. For the love of heaven, don't deceive me in a case like this!"

He looked down at her, and frowned but that did not beat her off.

"If you remain silent you will send me to Santa Fe. I will see this man for myself, and I will know all that this Jack Brown knows about his namesake. Play fair with me, that is all I ask. Now go on."

"Not to-night," he said, much to the girl's bitter disappointment. "I wish I hadn't told you that Colonel Smilax said anything—he said so little."

"Very well," said Gerta, through tight lips. "I shall see for myself!"

"All right; but I want to tell you that you will get nothing for your trouble. You go to Santa Fe, eh? Why, it's one hundred miles, and half of it is over Apache trails."

The resolute look in the girl's eyes was answer enough, but she said, calmly:

"I shall go, if the whole distance is through the Apache's playground! You know, Gold Chick, that my great desire is to know something about my birth and parentage. I had intrusted the solution of the secret to you. As pleasant as my life is here, I don't want to remain the Flower of San Tonquin. I shall see this Colonel Smilax, or Jack Brown, for myself."

Gold Chick gave the girl another deep look, and then walked toward the door. As he passed the table he picked up another envelope and thrust it into his pocket.

"The hunt for the lost padre begins right away," he said to the girl. "When we find him we will be on the trail that leads to the biggest bonanza underground. There is going to be some hot fighting for it, Gerta; hotter work than we had here to-night, and that cost ten lives!"

"Ten?" echoed the girl.

"Six Indians and four whites. One of the bucks got a gun and killed four ranchers in half a second."

"I did not know that."

"I saw it."

In another minute the girl was alone, and Gold Chick was hurrying away.

"She will go to Santa Fe," he said. "This trip must gain her no information; she must not meet Colonel Smilax. My tongue let slip too much before I could bridle it."

He walked to a certain little house which he entered and proceeded to light a lamp. "I'll add a postscript to my letter," he said aloud. "My pard in Santa Fe will attend to it immediately. Now that Father 'Selmo has run away, nothing can keep Gerta in San Tonquin."

He tore open the message he had written and sealed at Gerta's house, drew a chair up to a table and wrote underneath his signature the following:

"The girl is coming to Santa Fe to consult Colonel Smilax. You know what to do. She must never see him!"

He sealed the message in the envelope he had picked up on Gerta's table, and darted from the house.

As he stepped out into the street he heard a tumult on the plaza, and distinguished the oaths of a score of enraged men.

"Something new has happened," he said hastening forward. "By Jupiter! this is a night of surprises for San Tonquin!" and in a moment as it seemed he had reached the square.

"Hello! cap'n!" exclaimed a voice. "Doesn't this beat Satan's last order?"

"What has happened, Tunis?"

"Major Miguel was murdered to-night at the Red Lizard!"

Gold Chick started and let go an ejaculation of surprise.

"They found him in a little room dead on a bed with finger marks at his throat, and the man who war with him last can't be found."

"Who was he?"

"The Injun who helped us with the Apaches. Some call him Injun Nick."

Gold Chick started again, and then drew the informer aside.

"Tunis, I've got to send you to Santa Fe," he said at the same time thrusting the message into his hand. "It is a case as vital as life itself. You will take my message to Dolores Dash whom you know."

"If I should be held up and robbed, what?" asked the messenger.

"But you will not be; you must not! This letter must get to Dolores. It is as important to us as the finding of the Spanish El Dorado."

"Then, by the nine gods! it gets thar!" grated Tunis, as his hand thrust the letter into his bosom.

"If misfortune should overtake you, Tunis," said Gold Chick, compromisingly, "you must get to Santa Fe and say to Dolores these words: 'Selmo has run away and Gerta is coming to see Colonel Smilax!' I mean by this, that, if you are robbed of the letter, you must deliver the substance verbally."

The two men parted and Tunis almost instantly disappeared.

"I feel safe now," said Gold Chick, with a smile. "Dolores will act when he gets the message, and the girl's trip will be for nothing."

Major Miguel killed, eh? That only removes one hunter from the trail. No tears from Gold Chick, major!" And the desperado laughed.

CHAPTER IX.

COLDGRIP IN A TRAP.

WE left Captain Coldgrip waiting in the shadow of the little church for Injun Nick to emerge from the padre's hut, and with the reader's permission we will go back to the spot.

The detective was eager to encounter the desperate red-skin, and he waited for him with an eagerness which was hard to control.

Five—ten—twenty minutes passed away, and the Indian did not show himself.

What was the matter? Had the wily red-left the hut without being seen by the detective? This was not possible.

Captain Coldgrip waited awhile longer; he moved cautiously upon the hut and reached the door.

Not a sound of any kind came from the inside.

"If the red has hoodwinked me I will acknowledge it," laughed the detective, "but I will not do so till I have proof of it."

Proof was at hand as he was to find out.

After awhile his impatience got the best of him.

The little window at the side of the door told him that the interior of the hut was dark, and drawing a bowie, he raised the wooden latch and went in.

Captain Coldgrip was not certain that his entrance would not be disputed. He would not have been surprised if Injun Nick had fallen upon him the moment he crossed the threshold.

Silence and darkness greeted him. He doubted not now that the Scarlet Hercules was gone.

The detective coolly struck a match and surveyed the interior of the hut, and found it as had left it a few minutes before.

Injun Nick's escape was now a mystery and the match did not promise to solve it.

Captain Coldgrip searched every part of the padre's hut; nothing escaped his keen eyes.

"I give it up," he said reluctantly. "I must admit that my old enemy has outwitted me."

He went out and walked toward the plaza. He wanted to see San Diego Dolph, to tell him about Injun Nick's shrewdness. As for the Indian himself, he did not expect to encounter him.

An excited crowd was swearing and surging before the Red Lizard. As he drew near he heard the name of Major Miguel frequently mentioned.

In a little while the New York spotter knew all.

The proprietor of the hotel had been found strangled on his own premises, and the whole town was swearing vengeance against a person called Injun Nick.

"At his old tricks," remarked the detective to himself. "Major Miguel undoubtedly stood between the red-skin and some end, or he would not have died thus."

At this juncture there suddenly appeared on the porch of the Red Lizard a handsome man of stalwart proportions.

"That is the fellow the girl Gerta calls Gold Chick," exclaimed the detective. "He is going to address the crowd. We will hear what the new sport has to say."

"Men of San Tonquin!" cried Gold Chick in a loud voice, and his right hand went up to enforce silence.

The crowd grew still and pressed up to the porch, and those behind the speaker moved forward until Gold Chick's figure on a box towered above a dense mass of dark-faced men.

"Murder has been committed, men of San Tonquin," continued the sport. "Major Miguel has been strangled in his own house by a sneaking Indian who does not belong to the six swinging on the plaza. This vile assassin takes the major to his room with the coolness of a hired thug and does his work in cold blood. When he has finished it he steals away like a thief of blood, and leaves his victim to be found by his friends when they have missed him."

The crowd broke out fresh at the end of Gold Chick's remarks; threats, oaths, and cries for vengeance made the air tremble.

Gold Chick had no love for Major Miguel, but he had a scheme which he might carry out by inciting the lawless toughs against the landlord's slayer.

The shrewd desperado possessed no eloquence, but he knew how to handle the men by whom he was surrounded. He painted the killing of Major Miguel with the deepest colors, he told the crowd that the person known as Injun Nick was an assassin who killed solely for the sake of killing, and rated him below the Apaches who had just had a taste of San Tonquin justice.

"This red scorpion has pards," suddenly exclaimed Gold Chick. "They were in San Tonquin to-night, and they may be here now. Let every stranger be arrested and held till he proves his innocence, if he can. Vengeance for the blood of Major Miguel!"

The crowd took up the cry till it seemed to shake the stars that shone above the town. It is

an easy matter to transform a lot of men into a pack of demons, and Gold Chick possessed this faculty in an eminent degree.

"Search the town!" cried a dozen voices. "Hold court at the Red Lizard and fetch every stranger before it! Blood for blood!"

"Ransack old San Tonquin and find Injun Nick or his pards!" said Gold Chick to the crowd. "Court will convene at once, and woe to the man who does not tell the truth before its bar!"

The excited toughs drew back and Captain Coldgrip on the outside of the crowd mechanically pulled his hat over his eyes.

"I think I see through Gold Chick's scheme," he murmured. "He saw me at Gerta's and his eyes flashed like a tiger's. This big sport is trying to kill two birds with one stone. He wants the proscription to include me. I see his purpose!"

The detective turned away, but not in a hasty manner calculated to excite suspicion. A dozen men were within touching distance; he was liable to be seen at any moment.

It was a critical situation.

All at once he was brushed by a man into whose eyes he instantly looked.

"This takes us in, captain," said a voice. "Jehu! Gold Chick will be judge of the San Tonquin court and woe to us if they gather us in. I'm goin' away."

The speaker was San Diego Dolph, hat over his eyes and for once in his life at least pretty well frightened.

His voice was a whisper and he spoke rapidly.

"Padre 'Selmo is lost; we can't get a clew ter ther Spanish bonanza to-night, so what's the use of keepin' our necks in the noose? I found Wizard Dick, the Apache, in time to prevent another shootin' matinee, an' got him out of town. I'll see you later, captain; please excuse this mundane seraph!" And off he went before the detective could detain him or reply.

San Diego Dolph cannot be called a coward, but this was one of the times when he thought discretion the better part of valor.

The detective thus left alone proceeded slowly across the plaza. Six dark bodies were swaying under the main bough of the lynchers' tree, telling the fate of the Apache bucks whose foolhardiness had cost them their lives.

Captain Coldgrip momentarily expected to be halted, and he therefore kept one hand on the butt of a revolver.

As he neared the tree an unaccountable curiosity drew him toward the dead Indians.

"I don't see how Dolph picked Wizard Dick out; they were all alike to me," he murmured. "The three who escaped will make San Tonquin pay for this work. These are the first dead Apaches I ever saw."

The last sentence was unconsciously spoken aloud.

"Do you think they'll be the last?" asked a voice.

Captain Coldgrip recoiled as if a rattlesnake had sounded its alarm in his path.

Three figures instantly stepped forward, and in the drop of an eyelash he was looking into the barrels of as many revolvers with his own weapon only half-drawn.

"Hands down!" said the same voice, but with added sternness. "We play bold games wherever we go. Step forward, if you please. Ah! this is the man I mistook for Laredo when I wanted the Apache horse-guards shot. Proscription in San Tonquin is it, eh? All strangers are to be found and walked into Gold Chick's court for sentence! And all because somebody's hand paid their respects to Major Miguel's throat! Well, they won't examine you!"

By this time Captain Coldgrip had recognized the speaker, and brave as the detective was, the recognition was not a pleasant one.

Injun Nick stood erect before him, his old enemy and the man who had given him the slip in the padre's hut.

A thrill passed through the New York spotter at this discovery.

"You are one of the strangers included in Gold Chick's proscription," continued the Indian. "Let us do you a service. We are going away and we will take you safely beyond the mad pards of San Tonquin."

Captain Coldgrip hesitated.

The thought of going off with the Indian was not a pleasant one.

"He will not stop till he recognizes me," he said to himself. "I wanted to meet Injun Nick in the padre's hut, but I don't want to see him here. I would sooner go back and face Gold Chick's court. To leave San Tonquin with Injun Nick and his pards may be to lose Padre 'Selmo and the big bonanza forever."

"Come along, captain," said one of Injun Nick's companions. "We've been hyer ever since ther crowd left ther Apaches under ther tree, and we've heard everything, ther oaths ov ther crowd, an' Gold Chick's speech."

"You will go with us," said the Indian, as if he had recognized the detective. "It is said that all strangers come to San Tonquin on the same mission. If you are one, you have failed to find the big fortune."

Injun Nick seemed to laugh at the end of his sentence, and the hand that fell upon Captain Coldgrip's arm closed suddenly.

"Cover this man!" he said to the two men who stood near. "It is but a bound to our horses. You will go with us or keep the Apaches company under the tree. You may not know it, but I am Injun Nick, the man charged by Gold Chick with the killing of Major Miguel! Is it go, or death? You are the chooser."

Captain Coldgrip threw up his hand.

"I am in your hands," he said. "Under other circumstances I might not act thus."

In less than a minute he was some distance from the tree a prisoner in the hands of a detective's coolest and greatest foe.

The full beard that covered his face had prevented recognition. For once the eagle eyes of Injun Nick seemed at fault.

The detective was conducted to the outskirts of San Tonquin where several horses were found. Injun Nick placed his hand on his shoulder and said with a faint smile:

"We are going on, captain. You will go with us till we choose to set you at liberty."

This was more than the detective bargained for, but there was no alternative. One of the horses was brought forward and he was told to mount.

"We don't want Gold Chick's court to rope you in," the Indian continued. "It is a prejudiced institution and nobody excepting Injun Nick would get justice in it. And he doesn't intend to face it to-night."

The cool red-skin addressed Captain Coldgrip from the saddle of a fine horse at his side. On his right one of the two bronze men was mounted, and the keen eyes of the detective saw a strong cord leading from the bit of his own horse to the saddles of the desperado-sports.

"Why all this precaution if Injun Nick doesn't know me?" the New Yorker asked himself as he was conducted over a trail which was wide like a mountain stage road. "He has not intimidated anything of the kind, but he would not treat a stranger in this manner."

More than once in the next two miles Captain Coldgrip thought he detected the piercing eyes of Injun Nick covertly regarding him. Each glance was an arrow that seemed to go straight to the target.

Suddenly the Indian leaned toward the detective, and his fingers dropped upon the captain's rifle hand.

The New York detective shrunk at the touch. He looked into Injun Nick's face and saw his eyes dancing.

"Just as I thought!—the bloodless hand!" exclaimed the Indian. "You are my old friend, Captain Coldgrip! I thought we would come together one of these days for a bigger play than we've ever had. I have been waiting for the time with burning patience. It is here at last. I think you would like to go back to Gold Chick's court now, captain. Injun Nick would sooner find you than the Padre's Palace Mine. You dragged me two thousand miles across the country once. I will do more than that!"

The detective did not speak, but gave the Indian look for look.

CHAPTER X.

THE DOOMED DETECTIVE.

"WHAT is your opinion of the Spanish bonanza by this time, captain?" suddenly continued Injun Nick, his dark countenance lightened by a malicious grin. "Do you think the Mummy of San Tonquin holds the key they say he does?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, I see you don't want to give anything away," was the quick retort.

"I don't have to, Injun Nick!"

There was the defiance of a cool man in the last sentence.

For several moments the horses walked over the trail with silence among their riders. The Indian's face underwent several changes and the detective watched it with much interest.

Now that he was in the hands of an old enemy, what would be the outcome?

This was the man Colonel Julius Cantwell had warned him against before leaving New York, and his little ward, the child Estelle, had repeated the warning.

It was the same man who had lashed San Diego Dolph to a horse and sent him out upon the Texan plain to the voracious vultures. Injun Nick was merciless, and nobody knew it better than the New York spotter, now his prisoner.

Captain Coldgrip had seen in his lifetime how the Indian had served a white master; he could guess what he would do if he was the master himself.

"You haven't told me what you think of the Padre's Palace, captain?" suddenly resumed the Indian. "Let me talk a minute," and the red-skin looked into the detective's face and continued: "When you saw me last I was not on any gold trail. I didn't want money, but since then I've caught the yellow infection. When I was a boy, I heard first of this lost gold mine, but I didn't believe it had an existence. I believe different now. I used to serve a man named Richard Redhilt. Ah! you know him, I see, captain! He died suddenly in New York, and I was forced to leave the city. Then the Spanish bonanza got into my head again. I

resolved to find it. I came to this wild country and picked my pards up one by one. I knew where to look for most of them. I found some of the men who served Richard Redhilt when I was his right bower; they are my pards now, and you shall see them by and by.

"It has been a strange trail, captain," continued the Indian. "More than a hundred adventurers have lost their lives on it since the country was settled. It has taken me all over western Texas and New Mexico. I have been obliged to play some big games. I don't hesitate to say that I have taken life. You know what happened in San Tonquin to-night?"

"You killed Major Miguel—yes, I know that."

"I had to do it. He wanted to shoot the secret out of my head! He thought I had it—the fool! I've hung several bonanza-hunters, and sent others alive to the Texan vultures."

Captain Coldgrip could not repress a start at the coolness with which the last sentence was spoken. He thought of San Diego Dolph and his scarred bosom.

"Did you finish the young man who came into San Tonquin with the paper—the accusation—in his dead hand?" asked the captain, boldly.

"Did you see him?"

"Yes."

"And knew him?" the Indian asked, eagerly.

"I knew him, although I never saw him till I found him dead on the porch of the Red Lizard!"

"Who was he?"

"His name was Selim Strong."

"From the East?"

"From New York City!"

Injun Nick reflected for a moment.

"He was on the gold trail, too," he said, between his teeth. "Selim Strong, eh?"

Captain Coldgrip nodded.

"What was the name of the man who saved me from the Bowery roughs when I was playing Hercules in New York?" asked Injun Nick. "Was it Strong?"

"It was Selim's father!"

"My God!" cried the Indian. "I did not know he had a son!"

"He had one who ran away from home early in life. When I left New York, his sister, now my ward, placed a sealed packet in my hands. I was not to open it till I was five hundred miles away. Her instructions were faithfully obeyed, and when I opened it I found her brother's portrait and a letter from her begging me to find him if I could. Well, I have found him, as you see, Injun Nick."

"I would give a great deal if Selim Strong were alive, but it can't be helped now," murmured the red hunter. "If I could, I would share the Spanish bonanza with Estelle, as you call her. Do you know that Selim had two missions?"

"No."

"He had. He was hunting for the Spanish mine and was in love with the Flower of San Tonquin. I do not know that the pair ever met, but I am convinced that he loved her. If you had found the young man alive, what would you have done?"

"I would have sent him home," said the detective promptly. "It was his sister's request. He came into San Tonquin dead and in his hand was a paper accusing one San Diego Dolph of his murder."

Injun Nick smiled.

"Did it create any excitement?" he asked.

"It almost cost the man his life."

"I thought it would quite do so. I knew he was there."

"Do you know who San Diego Dolph is?"

"San Diego Dolph isn't he, captain?"

"Yes, if you think so," was the answer, and before the Indian could reply a burst of coarse laughter saluted all ears, and the three men were soon joined by a dozen stalwart men dark of face, black-eyed, roughly dressed and with long black hair.

"These are my gold-bugs, captain," said Injun Nick waving his hand toward the men as they swarmed about the prisoner. "Gentlemen, let me introduce my old acquaintance Captain Coldgrip, gold-hunter, sleuth-hound, and sport!"

Half a dozen exclamations told that the name was a familiar one even to the Indian's followers.

"Whar did yer find him, Injun?" asked several.

"Where I did not look for him—at San Tonquin," laughed the red rattler. "The Greasers had excitement to-night, and San Tonquin will not forget it soon. We did not find the padre, but this man does me just as much good."

Injun Nick dropped to the ground and continued in audible tones and with a glance at the detective.

"You will see that he doesn't try his wings, boys." And a dozen revolvers were cocked in Captain Coldgrip's sight.

The Indian walked to a well-built man and touched his arm; the two stepped aside together.

"Nugget Nox, I wish you could realize the importance of the capture I made to-night," Injun Nick said.

"I think I do if that man is the original Claude Coldgrip."

"He is no one else," was the reply. "I can afford to lose the Mummy of San Tonquin for a time to deal with him. I wish I could tell you what I owe that man."

Nugget Nox said nothing, but threw a quick glance toward the group that guarded the New York sleuth.

"What is to be done with him?" he asked. "You used to say, Injun Nick, that he should follow Jack Javert."

"The man we sent to the vultures!" exclaimed the Indian. "Is that the most terrible blow I can deal him?"

"I don't know of any more terrible. We have never heard of Javert since then."

"No; he rode on till the birds came and tore him to pieces. That was the fate of one gold-hunter. The man back yonder is more dangerous than a thousand men like Jack. He was never known to fail on a hunt, and is into the Spanish mine business body and soul."

"Then he dies!"

"For that if for nothing else!" grated the Indian. "But I want your brain to conjure up a doom more terrible than Jack Javert's. You are good in anything of this kind, Nugget Nox. If there was a patent-office in Tartarus, you could overrun it with inventions of new tortures. Now set your head to work."

Injun Nick folded his arms and looked at the glittering-eyed man who stood before him in the brilliant starlight.

"Give me something that will make his flesh creep; and it will take something terrible to do that, for he is cooler than the born desperado."

Nugget Nox put on his thinking-cap, and was not disturbed by his red master who was watching him with much impatience.

A few moments passed away, and then the white sport raised his head and caught the Indian's eye.

"You have it, Nox?" cried Injun Nick, eagerly.

"I think I have."

"Well, what is it?"

"It is a pretty long ride to the Grande Mesa."

"I don't care if it is a thousand miles, if I can inflict some new torture there."

"Then to the mesa we go!" said Nugget Nox.

Injun Nick looked at his pard as if he expected him to proceed, but the man did not.

"Do you intend to tell me now?" asked the Indian.

"The scheme will keep, and besides, I want to perfect it," was the reply.

"Answer me this, Nugget. Is his doom to resemble Jack Javert's?"

"But little. Captain Coldgrip is not to meet death in the saddle. Let me keep my plan for awhile, captain."

"You shall."

Apparently satisfied, Injun Nick turned back toward his prisoner with flashing eyes. He went forward rapidly and found the detective still guarded by his gold-bugs.

"To the Grande Mesa!" said the Indian in audible tones.

The dark toughs started and glanced from each others' faces to the prisoner.

A more resolute meeting of the detective's lips told that the Grande Mesa was a place not unknown to him.

"It's a pretty long ride, captain," said Injun Nick, leaning toward him from the saddle. "This is a finish of the game we had together two years ago. The Spanish bonanza and the Grande Mesa are entirely different things; there isn't an ounce of gold in one, the other is gold itself. Forward! to the Grande Mesa, my gold guloots."

The dozen horses all started off at once, and a minute later Captain Coldgrip, now doubly guarded and covered by deadly six shooters, was riding toward a spot of ground which could not be reached that night.

The mountains gradually disappeared, and the hoofs of the gold gang's horses stirred the reddish dust of the valley trails. Not an eye closed, and the steeds seemed to lose none of their freshness as mile after mile was left behind.

Captain Coldgrip had no chance left.

His weapons had been taken from him, and the quick manipulations of a cut lasso had fastened his arms at his side.

It was the detective's tightest trap.

On, still on went the dark riders and their prisoner. The stars went down and morning gradually came on.

"Look!" suddenly said Injun Nick to his prisoner as he pointed ahead. "You know what that is!"

Captain Coldgrip saw a magnificent stretch of table-land backed by a line of dark blue hills.

The scene was one of grandeur, but it did not impress the city sleuth in this manner.

"It is the Grande Mesa!" he said, answering Injun Nick's question and unconsciously speaking aloud.

The black eyes of the red Hercules were sparkling like polished coals, and he turned from the doomed detective to give Nugget Nox a fiercely thankful look.

As the party advanced toward the table-land, it came more prominently into view and the mountains grew more distinct, though they were still miles away.

At last the long ride ended, and the whole party drew rein in the middle of the Grande Mesa, with its broad grasses waving gently about their horses' feet.

"All eyes were fixed on Nugget Nox and all at once he said pointing at the ground:

"Dig a hole there three feet wide and five and a half feet deep."

Injun Nick uttered an exclamation of astonishment and the men began to slide from their saddles.

"Is it to be a living burial, Nugget?" asked the Indian captain, leaning suddenly toward his chief of torture.

"Worse than that!" was the quick response. "You wanted something new and you shall have it. Captain Coldgrip's experience shall be the only one of its kind. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes," said Injun Nick. "By Jove! Nugget Nox, I'd promote you if I could!"

CHAPTER XI.

DEMONISM.

THE sun when it rose saw three dark-shirted men working at a pit in the middle of the mesa.

A number of horses stood near, but only one had an occupant of the saddle, and he was a handsome man who paid but little attention to the trio at work.

Not far away with folded arms and eyes that emitted sparkling gleams stood an Indian in half-civilized garments.

He was a real giant in stature, good looking for one of his race, with the usual complement of black hair which touched his broad shoulders.

He watched the workmen with eagerness and impatience. Sometimes he would glance toward the mounted man as if to make sure that he had not escaped.

The diggers two whites and one Indian were working under the eyes of a man who sometimes gave directions in low tones. A few other men for the most part white men were lying in the grass of the mesa.

This was the sight seen by the sun which rose in the cloudless heavens, and gave promise of a warm day. A little breeze from the blue mountains that backed the mesa on the west, stirred the grass until its surface looked like the waves of a lake.

The man in the saddle was, of course, Captain Coldgrip, the Indian our old acquaintance, Injun Nick, and the man who was overseeing the pit his "chief of torture," as he called him—Nugget Nox!

The rising sun chased the dew from the slender blades of grass and peeped into the pit which was nearly up to a man's shoulders.

The breeze freshened as the work went on and when Nugget Nox turned to Injun Nick with an expressive smile the grass was bending as if before an approaching storm.

The eyes of the red-skin glittered under the look which he well understood.

The pit was done!

The men lounging in the grass sprung up and waited for orders, glancing while they waited from Injun Nick to Captain Coldgrip and back again.

"Captain, the last throw of the cards is here," said the Hercules, addressing the cool man, a prisoner in the saddle. "When I ordered the boys to the Grande Mesa, I saw by your eyes that you thought we would play the game out here. You do not expect me to play a child's hand when I hold a giant's? I have felt your power and you must now feel mine. The hand of Injun Nick is equal to the bloodless one possessed by the sleuth from New York. The Spanish bonanza and its wealth will never do you nor your employers any good. When I quit the mesa, I will find the lost padre if I have to ransack the big Southwest for him. He gave you the slip, eh? The Mummy of San Tonquin will not elude me and my gang. Take the man down, Nugget."

Half a dozen revolvers clicked and covered the detective as Nugget Nox stepped forward.

A flash of his bowie severed the ropes by which the detective's limbs were bound to the horse, and the next moment Claude Coldgrip stood among the grass of the table-land.

"Nothing to say, eh, captain?" ejaculated Injun Nick, leaning forward. "I did not think you would go to your death mum as an oyster. In New York you used to be a jolly companion."

"Words are not needed here," said the sleuth-hound. "The doom to which I am submitted is one decreed by a lot of cowards. I do not call them men!"

The Indian bit his lips and laughed with derision.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"That is enough."

A moment later Captain Coldgrip was marched toward the pit in the clutches of two men.

His hands still bound to his sides were useless; he was as surely doomed as if the iron walls of a prison hemmed him in.

In a little while he was lowered into the narrow pit which Nugget Nox's ingenuity had sug-

gested, and when he stood erect his head only was above ground.

"Fill up the grave!" commanded Injun Nick, and several men sprung eagerly to the task.

The fresh earth falling back around the detective rendered his position immovable, and when the work was finished his body was not to be seen.

His face was turned toward the mountains in the west and the stiff breeze fanned his cheeks and toyed with his mustache.

At a signal from Injun Nick the men sprung to their horses and drew off a little way leaving the two enemies together.

With eyes that flashed the full extent of his triumph, the Indian stepped toward the entombed detective and looked down upon him a moment without speaking.

"We are about to part forever, captain," he said. "The vengeance of Injun Nick will be complete when the sun sets. The vultures will come long before that, but you will not see them."

"Why not?" asked the lips above the mesa.

"Because Nugget Nox's scheme is not completed. I am going back to the bonanza trail. The lost padre will not be lost long. I struck pay dirt at San Tonquin, but I had to kill to keep it. I am doing the same now, as you see. I would sooner have a dozen real bloodhounds on my trail than Captain Coldgrip. They are not one half as dangerous. No word to send to Padre Selmo, captain? I will find him or I am not Injun Nick!"

"Go and find him then!" cried the detective. "We will take care of the future when it comes."

"What! do you expect to escape?" exclaimed Injun Nick his eyes getting a new flash of rage. The New York sleuth-hound made no reply.

"Your future is almost here!" said the red Hercules drawing back. "I leave you now. When they beat Injun Nick, they beat Satan at his own game!"

The last sentence was supplemented with a laugh which Captain Coldgrip heard while the red rattler was walking toward the mounted group waiting for him. He saw him mount and heard him give a command in a loud voice.

"Back to the gates of the Padre's Palace!" and then the whole band wheeled and dashed toward the mountains leaving the detective entombed in the middle of the mesa.

"You may find the gates of pandemonium first!" said Captain Coldgrip with his eyes fastened on the vanishing crowd. "This piece of devilry is not new in the Southwest, but I never expected to have it practiced on me. But the man who sent San Diego Dolph to the vultures is capable of anything."

He continued to watch Injun Nick and his band until they became a moving speck far away toward the mountains.

The sun was already beating down upon him with considerable power, and he thought with a shudder what it would do when it reached the meridian when not a breath of wind would tremble the grass that surrounded him.

"I was warned against Injun Nick before I set out on this gold trail, but I found him when I was not looking for him," murmured the doomed detective. "This is his game, and the trick is his. There may come a time when—Heavens! what is that?"

The exclamation and question were suddenly caused by a whitish object which had appeared against the dark-blue of the distant mountains.

Captain Coldgrip kept his eyes riveted upon it, and seemed to hold his breath while he looked.

"Aha! I get the full measure of the devilry now!" he exclaimed. "Injun Nick has fired the grass!"

The horror of this discovery was enough to blanch cooler cheeks than Captain Coldgrip's.

He saw a long line of smoke which told him that the mesa had been fired in several places, and the strong wind that blew in his face was bringing the fire rapidly forward.

He could do nothing but watch the smoke and calculate the distance between him and the flame.

Injun Nick and his pards had disappeared; the curling smoke was between Captain Coldgrip and his inveterate enemy.

If the detective could have looked through the smoky curtain which had interposed itself between him and the mountains, he would have seen a group of horsemen watching the fire.

Injun Nick sat in one of the foremost saddles with the breeze blowing his long black hair around his swarthy face, and his eyes agleam with the triumph of a modern demon.

The Scarlet Hercules seemed pleased beyond measure. His own hand had fired the grass, and the torches of willing lieutenants had carried the flame to a dozen other places, until the breeze, uniting all, had sent one vast fire soaring and leaping across the mesa!

The sight was one of awful sublimity, notwithstanding the terrible fact that the fire was rushing down upon a man completely at its mercy.

Injun Nick enjoyed the scene. He had ridden apart from his companions and was watching it alone.

"This is the last of the New York sleuth-hound," he said between his teeth. "It is a worse fate than the one to which we sent Jack Javert. There is no revenge like Injun Nick's! I would not have thought of this last play, but Nugget Nox thinks of everything."

The fire leaped on, getting further from the revengeful red who showed no disposition to re-join his band.

He could not see beyond the rolling volume of smoke and the hissing tongues of flame as the latter destroyed the grass, but he could picture in his fertile imagination a blanched human face above the ground, and two eyes appealing to Heaven for help.

"Captain, are we to go on?" said a voice at his side, and the Indian looked into the face of his chief of torture, Nugget Nox.

"I'll throw one-half of the Spanish 'find' at your feet for this!" Injun Nick exclaimed, clutching the bronzed sport's arm as he leaned toward him. "See how the fire tries to get at the boss tracker of America! It is rushing upon him with the fury of a horde of tigers! This pays all the debts I owe Captain Coldgrip. He never thought of this when he was dragging me across the continent in a palace car. New York and its courts were in his mind then, not the Grande Mesa and a doom like this! I wish I could stay here until I could see nothing ahead but a blackened waste; but the new game awaits us. From this hour we can play for the Spanish bonanza with no fears of Claude Coldgrip. Yes, we will move on, Nugget Nox. Jupiter Pluvius! was there ever a vengeance like Injun Nick's?"

"Thar never war!" said the man, who turned away with a final glance at the fire sweeping on like a sea of flame.

Injun Nick wheeled his horse and turned in his saddle.

"Some time I will come back, captain!" he shouted, as if his words could reach the doomed detective far away. "I have marked the spot, and I can find it at night if necessary. Injun Nick will one day look upon his work, and it will be when he holds the key to the lost Ophir. Three cheers, men of gold, for the revenge of the Scarlet Hercules!"

Injun Nick took off his hat and whirled it above his head in the faces of his band. A dozen sombreros were lifted at the signal, and the next moment three ringing cheers rose above the roar of the fire!

"That ends the play!" cried the captain, riding to the head of the band. "Once more we move upon the bonanza big enough to make fifty men millionaires!"

A dozen spurs touched the heated rowels of as many steeds, and the fiends of mountain and plain were once more on the gallop.

Their backs were to the fire now, but every now and then their red leader threw a victorious look over his shoulder.

The mesa was fast being burned over, for the grass was dry, and yielded readily to the flames.

Injun Nick felt that he had scored one of the greatest triumphs of his life.

"When will it end?" he asked Nugget Nox, after a backward glance at the fire.

The chief of torture threw a quick look east. "It is all over now," he said.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAIL OF A MUMMY.

In the mean time, a somewhat thrilling event connected with our story had happened elsewhere.

Let us see what it was, and, in order to do so, we must go back to San Tonquin.

The court established by Gold Chick for the examination of strangers had not been productive of satisfactory results.

The sudden departure of Injun Nick and Captain Coldgrip had stripped the town of persons of this sort, so that the mad parids found nobody on whom to wreak vengeance for the murder of Major Miguel.

Gold Chick waited at the Red Lizard until he lost his patience, and then took his departure, outwardly very anxious to avenge the landlord's death, but inwardly caring very little for the unfortunate major.

He regarded him only in the light of a rival adventurer, which indeed he was, another of those men whose overmastering desire was to find the long-buried millions of the Padre's Palace Mine.

Major Miguel had tried to play a bold hand against a person who was his superior in strength, agility and cunning, and the play had terminated disastrously for him.

In short, the owner of the Red Lizard had fallen a prey to the tiger ferocity of Injun Nick.

Gold Chick went straight to Padre 'Selmo's little hut after leaving the hotel.

As we know, he was not the first person who had visited it in search of the Mummy of San Tonquin, and if he expected to find 'Selmo at home, he was doomed to disappointment.

The little hut, with its few articles in confusion, had not been visited since Injun Nick's departure, and Gold Chick did not think it necessary to spend much time there.

"Something has frightened Father Anselmo off," the sport ejaculated. "He is not a man to leave without cause. Can it be that he really possesses the key of the Spanish bonanza, as report says, and that he has fled to it when he found somebody hot on the trail. I have a little time on my hands. Tunis is on his way to Santa Fe to tell the captain that 'Selmo is missing, and that Gerta wants to visit Santa Fe in person to see Colonel Smilax, alias Jack Brown, of Brown's Valley. Now, I am going to see what kind of a sleuth-hound I make."

A moment later Gold Chick had the door of 'Selmo's hut behind him.

"Nearly one year ago 'Selmo turned up missing, and remained away for seven days. He had San Tonquin turned upside down during his absence, and when he came back nobody got any satisfaction from him. He was last seen to enter the church, and when he reappeared, he came out of it."

Gold Chick walked to the little church with words like these falling from his lips, pushed the door open and entered.

Captain Coldgrip, as the reader will recollect, had been there before him, but he was not aware of this.

Gold Chick found the interior of the church dark enough for the use of a match; he struck one as he advanced up the narrow aisle, and saw objects with tolerable distinctness.

"This may be profanity, but I can't help it," he said with a slight chuckle. "I would invade the realm of the dead for a key to the Padre's Palace. I want to find what men have died for. Don't I know that the Spanish Mine is not a myth? Nobody believes it is but a lot of fools and cowards."

Gold Chick advanced to a little alcove behind the altar. It was carpeted with a kind of matting, which was well worn but still intact.

He lit one of the little candles found by his match, and then took up the matting.

A board flooring rewarded his labors, and one apparently without any cracks.

The keen eyes of the mine-hunter glistened as he moved his candle over the floor and inspected every square inch of its surface.

Here and there he struck it with the hilt of his bowie, and listened attentively to the sounds produced. At last his eyes caught a new gleam, and the next moment the point of the bowie was in a crack scarcely perceptible to the keenest eye.

"They have to outwit Satan when they beat Gold Chick!" broke from the sport's lips, and then he moved a board, with the strong blade of the eight-inch bowie as the motive power.

Three minutes later, with a force almost transfigured by triumph, Gold Chick was looking into a dark opening large enough to admit the body of a man.

His eyes gleamed with unmistakable victory, and he looked like a man who had suddenly discovered a mine of wealth.

Gold Chick held his little candle into the place, but its feeble light could not dissipate the darkness.

"I'll get at the bottom of this find, if it ends in China!" he exclaimed. "I don't say that I have found the Padre's Palace, but, by Jupiter! I've made a discovery unknown to San Tonquin."

He lowered the trap back into its place, and dashed from the church, not for help, but for a coil of black rope, with which he soon returned, determined and full of hope.

Once more Gold Chick leaned over the trap in the little alcove. He uncoiled the rope and dropped it into the pit, retaining one end in his hand.

His heart gave a sudden throb when the lasso touched bottom.

The San Tonquin sport next proceeded to secure one end of the rope to a stationary fixture near by, and the next minute he had equipped himself for an adventure of some kind.

With several little waxen candles in his pockets, and his bowie held firmly between his teeth, Gold Chick caught the rope and lowered himself resolutely into the opening.

Stygian darkness closed about the sport as he descended hand-over-hand until he had reached the end of his cord.

"Just rope enough!" chuckled Gold Chick when he stood on solid ground and caught his breath, for the descent had been rather rapid. "I don't know what this find will amount to, but I'm in for all thar is of it, gold or no gold."

The next moment he had struck a match and lighted one of the candles.

Hard walls surrounded him on three sides and the gold sport could not repress an exclamation when he found on them marks of iron tools.

In a little while Gold Chick was moving down a narrow corridor whose low ceiling made him stoop.

Every now and then he stopped to examine the walls and not infrequently he gave utterance to ejaculations of joy.

Gold Chick believed himself in luck.

All at once a puff of air—strange for that weird place—put out his candle.

The San Tonquin sport gave vent to an oath of vexation and searched his pocket for a match. Then another curse was heard as the gold hunter

discovered that he had used the last one, and that he possessed no means to prosecute the hunt!

Gold Chick swore roundly and in bad humor as he ransacked his pockets for a lucifer. He cursed his stupidity in not bringing more matches, and the wind which had extinguished his candle came in for a good share of abuse.

"Hang it all! I'll go ahead in the darkness!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I'll make the best of a poor 'hand' as I've done many a time before. If this is the Spanish Mine, I can afford to lack a few lucifers. Here goes! I'm a dandy in the dark, for I've got the eyes of an owl!"

Once more Gold Chick was moving down the corridor, deeper and deeper into some unknown place.

If one could have seen him he would have noticed an expression of stern resolution in his eyes. He carried a naked bowie in his right hand ready for any emergency that might occur.

Gold Chick kept on until a noise checked him.

It was a slight noise like that made by the falling of a stone on a hard natural floor.

Of course it was enough to bring the San Tonquin sport to a halt.

He leaned against the wall at his right and listened.

"I am under San Tonquin, as near as I can calculate," he said to himself. "There's more than one man there who'd give his head to stand where I stand. Gold Chick, you have found the millions of the Spanish discoverers. You are the lucky man of a thousand. What's the use of hunting for Father 'Selmo now? As a sleuth-hound on a gold-trail, I'm a premium success!"

For more than ten minutes Gold Chick listened for another sound, but none came.

He was a hundred yards from the lasso he had left dangling in the shaft. Should he go back or advance?

If he had been supplied with matches he would not have hesitated a moment, but what could he do in the dark?

The way back was almost straight; he could find his lasso by feeling the wall of the corridor he had traversed.

"I'll go back for a light," he said. "What's the use of being born with a silver spoon in your mouth when you can strike a find like this? Now, with Gerta kept from meeting Colonel Smilax, and the key to the Padre's Palace in my hands, I'm the reigning nabob of America. Jehosaphat! I could jump over the Red Lizard!"

He turned to go back, when the strange noise again assailed his ears.

This time it did not have the sound of a falling stone.

Gold Chick leaned forward with every sense on the alert, and his bronzed fingers got a firmer grip on the bowie handle.

The next moment a thunderous report, accompanied by a dazzling flash, drove him back. He uttered a cry of horror!

The air about him seemed on fire and the fumes of sulphur almost stifled him.

For the moment Gold Chick, brave as he was, was in an agony of terror.

The sudden light died away as quickly as it had flashed into existence.

"Is this Satan's workshop?" exclaimed the sport. "In the name of wonder—"

He stopped abruptly, for a little flame had sprung into life, and Gold Chick leaned forward and watched it increase in strength.

As he did so, he saw that it was burning against a wall about twenty feet away, and while he looked he saw the outlines of a huge hand pierced with two daggers, whose hilts shone as if set in diamonds.

"I see the magic—where is the magician?" exclaimed the San Tonquin sport.

He was answered almost before he had ceased to speak.

All at once in the light of the fire appeared a figure which almost drove the gold sport back. It was a little figure scarcely five feet in height with closely shaven head and a skin as yellow as the parchment covering of a mummy.

Gold Chick's distended eyes became fastened upon it from the first, for he had discovered that he stood in the presence of the runaway padre Anselmo.

When the sport recovered from his astonishment his first thought was to rush and seize the Mummy of San Tonquin; but he restrained himself with an effort and continued to look on.

All at once the light shining on the wall grew dim and the dagger-pierced hand vanished. In its place appeared the well-defined head of a Spanish friar of a past century, and not unlike Father 'Selmo's.

"I'll surprise the Mummy and end this juggling!" exclaimed Gold Chick. "When my hand touches him the old fellow will jump out of his hundred years' hide. Here goes for business and sport."

The sport of San Tonquin glided forward on tip-toe, his eyes fixed on the little figure of the padre, and his fingers moving nervously as if eager to close on their prey.

Padre 'Selmo seemed utterly oblivious of the sport's approach. He could not hear it for Gold Chick's tread was as silent as the panther's.

All at once the big hand of the San Tonquin gold-bug was lifted above the Mummy's head, but before it could descend upon his shoulder, the lips of the friar's head on the wall seemed to move and a voice uttered one word:

"Danger!"

Quick as a flash the little padre turned and the next instant with a cry that seemed but half human, he dashed at Gold Chick's throat!

"Jupiter Pluvius!" cried the sport, as he was forced back by a power which the little padre did not seem to possess. "The old man has drank a tiger's blood! This is getting at the Spanish find with a vengeance. See herel my friend, Father 'Selmo; I am Gold Chick. You don't want to spoil my skin! What a tiger you are! For the love of Heaven, let-go-my-throat!"

The answer was a strange wild laugh, and Gold Chick was hurled against the wall as if from the hands of a new Hercules, when, in truth, his only assailant was the Mummy of San Tonquin.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GOLDEN PRISON.

GOLD CHICK had found the lost padre, and very unexpectedly at that!

He struck the stony wall with crushing force. A real Hercules could not have dealt more harshly with him.

Unable to break the force of the assault, he staggered from the wall with his brain in a whirl, while the figure of Father 'Selmo seemed to transform itself into a Goliath.

"Hades and horns! if this is the way to the Padre's Palace, I've had nearly enough of it!" he exclaimed, and then something struck him again and a pair of hands with long fingers clutched his throat.

The San Tonquin mine-hunter attempted to shake his assailant off, but the attempt was a futile one.

All at once the light went out, and at the same moment Gold Chick staggered to his feet with a sense of suffocation.

He was in darkness again and free!

For some time the sport heard nothing, then a noise at his right attracted him and he leaned toward it with the bowie in his hand again.

"Pard?" said a voice with a strange sound.

"Pard?" echoed Gold Chick, surprised. "Who calls me pard?"

"All that's left of Colonel Sloper, of Stanislaus."

"What! are you the big colonel of the Golden Gulch?"

"I am. You know me, then?"

"No man who has visited Stanislaus but has heard of you," said Gold Chick. "When did you come here?"

"Six months ago."

The San Tonquin sport uttered an exclamation of horror.

The speaker was close to him, but unseen. Gold Chick felt a hand resting lightly on his arm.

"You haven't been here all the time?" he exclaimed.

"I've been nowhar else," was the answer. "I guess we're in the same boat."

"How?"

"We want the Spanish Mine. Two fools with but a single thought!"

And Colonel Sloper laughed in a manner not very pleasing to the man forced to listen.

"Tell me how you came here. I am thunder-struck," said Gold Chick. "The Mummy of San Tonquin has the ingenuity and strength of Satan, hasn't he?"

"Yes. I left Stanislaus county a year ago," was the answer. "I thought I had the big bonanza in my hands. I did not strike the real trail till six months later. I came to San Tonquin hot on the track. One night I wouldn't have sold my prospects for a solid million; the next day I would have given that sum for a minute's freedom. I found too much."

The man paused for a moment and Gold Chick felt the unseen hand tighten on his arm.

"I found the way to this place," Colonel Sloper continued. "I unearthed the little trap door in the alcove of the church above us. I had a rope and eager to find the Spanish bonanza, down I went. When I was half-way down the rope was cut from above."

"Jehosaphat!" ejaculated Gold Chick. "Who cut it?"

"The giant and devil in a mummy's skin!" was the reply.

"And you fell to the bottom?"

"Headlong through blackn ss," said the man from Stanislaus.

"It must have been thirty feet."

"It seemed a thousand."

"Why, were you not killed?"

"Because I was reserved for a worse fate," said Colonel Sloper bitterly. "Since that night I have been the Mummy's prisoner."

"And the captive of the Padre's Palace, eh?" ejaculated Gold Chick.

A pair of lips suddenly touched the sport's ear.

"This is only the ante-room of the lost bonanza," they said in a whisper.

"Where is the mine itself?"

"Not very far off."

"You have seen it?"

"No."

"Then how do you know where it is?"

"I have felt its riches. I guess I know gold when I touch it."

Gold Chick felt a thrill over the last words.

"Show me where it is and we'll play a hand that will astonish this gold Cerberus," he cried.

"You and I, colonel! We ought to be able to beat a little padre if he has the eyes of Satan and the muscles of Hercules! He took me un-awares to-night. He had me by the throat before I could get in my work. Did he ever throw you against the wall?"

"No."

"Why haven't you tried to escape during your six months?" asked the San Tonquin sport eagerly. "From what I've heard of you, you are a giant physically, colonel."

A groan was the first response and then these words startled Gold Chick:

"I used to be, but now I couldn't handle a boy."

"What has happened?"

There was no answer and the hand that had lain on Gold Chick's arm was withdrawn.

"I won't insist, if you don't like to tell, colonel," the sport said.

"I'll tell you, but first let me say that I'd sooner be the meanest Chinese beggar of Frisco than Colonel Jove Sloper of Stanislaus. I am ham-strung!"

A loud cry pealed from Gold Chick's throat.

"Who did it?"

"The Mummy of San Tonquin," was the hissed reply.

"Do you think he intends to serve me thus?"

"Heaven knows. Padre 'Selmo is capable of anything."

"He was bound to keep you here, colonel."

"Yes. I am among the lost riches of the old Spanish explorers, but they do me no good."

"Why haven't you tried to pay this fiend back?"

"I have tried it, but I never catch him at the right time. I believe I am not the only person who has found the Padre's Palace."

"Not the only one?" echoed the San Tonquin sport.

"There are three human skeletons in a certain room to which I have crawled," said Sloper. "I have felt them. Captain, don't you think we should be pards?"

The question ended with a laugh.

"We will be friends!" said Gold Chick. "I am not going to stay here. The power of this human fiend shall not keep me in this underground Tartarus. I am Gold Chick, bent on finding the Spanish Ophir, and a dangerous man. Where do you think the new Satan is now?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I hear nothing of him for days."

"Does he come down by way of the shelf under the church?"

"I can not say."

"I'll see what has become of my rope!" exclaimed Gold Chick. "You ought to know this place even in the dark."

"I do. I haven't seen daylight for six months. I must look like a demon of hair. I can take you to the shaft."

"Come on, then."

The next moment Gold Chick was following a man who crawled rapidly along the wall. A thousand thoughts seemed to fill his brain at once. He had heard wild stories around the mountain camp-fires, but the terrible reality of his own adventure surpassed them all.

At any moment he was liable to be attacked by the being who was more than half tiger, and this is why he followed Colonel Sloper with his fingers wound firmly about the hilt of his bowie.

The trip back to the shaft seemed an endless one, and when Gold Chick began to fear that the padre's prisoner had missed the way he heard his voice say:

"We are here."

"In the shaft, colonel?" cried the San Tonquin.

"In the shaft."

Gold Chick's rung forward and moved his arms in the darkness.

"The rope is gone!" he said.

"Just as I expected," said Sloper.

"The Mummy has been here."

"Undoubtedly."

"I'd give a thousand to meet him just now!" grated the infuriated sport. "I would surrender my chances for paradise, to hold him in my clutches one minute."

Colonel Sloper laughed derisively.

"That's what I've said a thousand times, Gold Chick. He is one of the birds that always stay in the bush. I guess you'll have to make the best of a bad case. We are fellow-prisoners in the ante-room of the biggest bonanza underground."

Gold Chick leaned against the wall and felt a cold thrill shoot to his heart.

A prisoner underground, and with no hopes of

escape! And, what was worse, he was in the power of the guardian of the gold secret—the padre-Satan of San Tonquin!

Colonel Sloper seemed to know that his fellow captive was busy with his thoughts, for he did not speak.

If Gold Chick could have pierced the gloom of the shaft he would have seen a wild-looking man crouched at his feet—a man whose face was covered with long, gray hair, out of which peeped two sunken eyes with a demoniac stare.

This was the once handsome Jove Sloper of Stanislaus, the King of Golden Gulch, the best rider, the coolest man, and the pistol prince of California!

If Gold Chick could have seen his companion, he would have recoiled with a cry of horror, which might have been succeeded by expressions of pity.

"Where is the mine itself?" he suddenly asked.

"Aha! you're bound to find it, I see!" exclaimed Sloper.

"Why not? I have risked life before for this very prize. The net of the padre shall not keep me back."

"Follow me," said Sloper and again Gold Chick was feeling his way after the mutilated man.

"Are we under San Tonquin?" he asked, leaning forward.

"Yes. I once crawled up a narrow passage which must have been a stair at one time, and heard the faint voices of men."

Gold Chick started.

"What did you do?"

"I yelled till I lost my voice," answered Sloper. "I think I was directly under the Red Lizard, but, then, I do not know."

"Can you find that passage for me?"

"I can go all over this golden tomb."

There was no more conversation between the two men until Colonel Sloper stopped and announced in a low voice that they had reached the end of the second trip.

"Hold your hand toward me," continued Sloper, and Gold Chick put forth his hand with his heart in his throat.

The next moment a piece of rough rock was placed in his palm, and his fingers closed swiftly about it.

"Weigh that," said the colonel's voice, triumphantly.

A cry of amazement sprung from Gold Chick's tongue.

"Jupiter Pluvius! is there much rock of this kind here?" he asked.

"The cave is full of it," was the answer.

"You must remember, Gold Chick, that you have discovered the Padre's Palace."

"Show me the walls."

"I have no matches."

The San Tonquin sport bit his lip when he remembered that want of matches had kept him in the mine. If he had not run short of them, he might not have been Padre 'Selmo's prisoner at that moment.

"How large is this room?" he asked.

"Look for yourself, Gold Chick. It is almost circular. Go around the walls with your hands. You will come back to me presently."

"By Jupiter! I will!"

Gold Chick started off and was soon gliding along a rough wall which he could not see. Now and then his feet would strike some loose rocks on the ground, but he managed to keep from falling.

After a while he ran against a hand, and then stopped suddenly at a laugh which he recognized as the colonel's.

"Back again, eh, Gold Chick!" exclaimed the man from Stanislaus. "What do you think of it?"

"It is vaster than my dreams made it," was the reply of the astonished sport. "Now, colonel, if I can turn the tables on the imp of this bonanza, there'll be two boss gold kings in San Tonquin."

"You can't do it."

An oath leaped from Gold Chick's lips.

"You have lost hope," he said, stooping and finding the arm of Colonel Sloper. "Imprisonment has taken all your nerve. The cage that can hold me does not exist. I am going to own this bonanza as sure as San Tonquin stands above us! You hear me, Colonel Sloper? You hear the first and only Gold Chick in the universe!"

"I thought that way once myself; but what am I now?"

"A man with no sand!"

Gold Chick heard teeth grate in the darkness.

"There was a time when I would have killed you for those words," said the man from Stanislaus; "but now I submit. If you catch this infamous fiend, I want permission to fasten my teeth in his throat."

"I give it to you now!" said Gold Chick.

"Then may you find him soon!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN ON THE MESA.

FAR above the rolling cloud of smoke and long tongues of flame fifty vultures were wheeling through the air.

They were far above the burning mesas and higher than the mountains that backed it on the west.

A strong wind was driving the fire toward the hills, and the grass was being eaten up by the demon tongues that leaped in and out among the smoke.

In the middle of the mesa, where he had been left by the merciless red-skin, Captain Coldgrip watched the progress of the destroying element without a single chance of escape.

The earth which the gold desperadoes had thrown back into his tomb had been packed solidly around him, rendering him unable to move a single limb.

Never before had a human being been left to face a fate as merciless as his.

The fire had a strange fascination for the detective.

He could have looked away and avoided it, but he kept his eyes fastened upon it as he seemed to count the minutes that intervened between him and the end.

Nugget Nox had not disturbed the grass about the pit which had been dug under his eye. The long blades bending before the breeze touched Coldgrip's face. In a little while they would yield to the fire!

"I've read of demonism before now, but this display outdoes it all," he murmured. "If there is a greater devil than this one in red, I would like to know where he is. My friend, Colonel Cantwell, may never get his share of the Spanish bonanza. It begins to look that way now. Give me another chance and I will swear that Injun Nick shall never enjoy the wealth even if he should discover the secret! This is the closest fit of my life. Estelle, who could dream of a man at the mercy of a pack of vultures, never had a vision as terrible as this fiendish reality."

He ceased and fell to watching the flames again.

The roar was almost deafening now. It equaled the sound of surf on a stormy shore, and the sound increased as the devouring element neared the doomed man.

Captain Coldgrip shut his teeth hard and waited—he could do no more.

On, on came the fire!

He waited bareheaded in the warm rays of the climbing sun, and the wind toyed with his long hair and his mustache.

After awhile he felt the heat in his face. The breeze so cool in the early morning was hot, almost stifling, now.

Was there no escape?

He turned his head and looked to the left to see nothing but the bending grass-blades of the doomed mesa. He threw a glance to the right and saw the same hopeless view.

Behind him were the mountains and the fire! The New York detective was forced to give up hope.

In the early stages of his strange imprisonment he had thought of San Diego Dolph, but that worthy had slipped gradually from his mind. In all probability that gold-hunter was looking for the Spanish bonanza in or about San Tonquin, if, indeed, he had not been hauled up before Gold Chick's court.

At last Captain Coldgrip saw two dark specks above the mesa grass far over his right shoulder. He looked twice before he could believe that his eyes had not deceived him.

"Horses!" he said to himself, and then added: "They may be wild ones and riderless. The chances are that they are flying from the fire. At any rate Injun Nick has not relented."

Nearer and nearer came the fire, hissing and rolling on with a fury wholly indescribable.

The horses became larger as they approached, and the detective had turned from the red deluge to them.

All at once he discovered that the steeds had riders, and they came on almost directly between him and the fire, the magnificent animals straining every nerve, as if under the influence of the spur.

It was now a race between horseflesh and fire, and Captain Coldgrip watched it with the most vivid emotions.

He was the stake of the game now being played; the wild race was for him!

He saw one of the horsemen rise in his stirrups and look toward him with eyes shaded by his hands. Oh, for a hand to wave at him, to tell him where he was!

The detective shouted with all his might, but the roar of the fire seemed to beat his voice back. He shouted again and again, but the men on the steeds did not hear.

"As certain as fate they will pass me!" ejaculated Coldgrip. "By Jove! the foremost man is San Diego Dolph; his companion is an Indian. Wizard Dick, the Apache, for a thousand!"

Hotter and hotter grew the air.

The blackened cinders of the burned grass blew in his face and lodged among the blades that almost touched his cheeks.

The most critical moment of the mesa horror had arrived.

Down came the two horsemen thundering before the fire and straight toward the doomed man.

He could see that they were looking beyond

him, searching the mesa far beyond the spot where he had faced Injun Nick's sentence.

He saw San Diego Dolph look back and say something to the Indian pressing up with all his might.

The steeds were almost upon him, and he had not been discovered.

The next moment he shouted at the top of his voice.

"Dolph! Dolph! I am here!—here! For God's sake don't ride me down!"

The swarthy and hatless man in the front saddle uttered a wild cry and threw his foamy steed back upon his haunches. And not a moment too soon. Another bound of the horse would have planted a hoof in the sleuth's face!

The next moment San Diego Dolph sprang to the ground and ran forward. The eyes of the two men met as the new arrival leaned forward.

"Buried alive and left to the fire, eh?" ejaculated Dolph. "By Jove! this beats my tussle with the vultures. The same man did both!"

"Injun Nick, the scarlet devil!" said the detective.

The Indian who accompanied San Diego Dolph was on the ground and already at work.

With his long knife he was cutting the grass in front of the buried detective, and throwing it toward the fire in crushed bunches.

"That Injun knows what's to be done," said Dolph, turning from Captain Coldgrip. "He's worth a dozen Spanish Mines in a case of this kind. I'll help him out!"

A moment later the New York spotter was watching the two men as their knives cut the grass away.

They had to work fast, for the fire was sweeping on as if determined to render their efforts useless.

The wild-eyed horses drew back and snorted madly as the flames advanced.

It was a battle between man and the elements.

At last the Apache rose and threw a triumphant look at the fire.

A considerable space had been cleared in front of Captain Coldgrip, but was it enough? San Diego Dolph worked till the terrible heat drove him back.

"We've got to put up with what we've done, cap'n," he said, turning to the detective. "If I hadn't broken a girth awhile ago we'd have been here sooner. Bring up the horses, Dick."

Wizard Dick led the steeds forward and held them between Captain Coldgrip and the fire.

A moment later a cloud of hot smoke was in their faces and for a few seconds the breathless group was lost to view!

When the fire passed on, the group was still where it had been last seen, and San Diego Dolph sprang toward a head that rose above the mesa and uttered an exclamation of joy.

With redoubled fury the flames were sweeping on before the stiff breeze, but the little square about Captain Coldgrip was the only unburnt spot in sight!

"We've echedered death and will soon be ready to pay the Injun back, captain," cried San Diego Dolph. "When he tumbles into my clutches I'll show him a bigger game than the one he has just played."

The sport stopped suddenly and drew back with a stareful look at the head before him.

"Great Scot! Dick, the New York sleuth is dead!"

The Apache pard came forward with a look of horror in his black eyes. He stooped and looked into the pallid face which had fallen back, but the next moment he turned his gaze upon Dolph.

"The white man will live to hunt Injun Nick," he said.

"Ho! he isn't dead then?"

"No," said the Indian. "The fire did not reach him."

The sudden change from doom to rescue had deprived the New Yorker of consciousness, and a few moments sufficed to restore him, when Dolph and the Indian began to dig him out with their knives.

"We got on to your capture accidentally, captain," said San Diego Dolph. "We strained every nerve to find you an' here we are. When we discovered that the trail led toward the Grande Mesa, we knew that Injun Nick would play some new deviltry here. Was the chief master of ceremonies a fellow called Nugget Nox?"

"Yes."

"The same man who suggested my torture!" was the reply. "What he doesn't know in the school of meanness isn't worth knowing. One of these days I'll show him a trick that will discount his very best."

"What happened in San Tonquin after I left? Did anybody have to appear before Gold Chick's tribunal?"

"No."

"The pards found no one, then?"

"Nary a victim. Wizard Dick here wanted to wade in and add to the graveyard, but I held him back."

Captain Coldgrip glanced at the Indian and saw a flash illumine his eyes.

"This red quantity is not Injun Nick's physical

equal, but he is no mean match for the Scarlet Hercules," he said to himself.

The task of digging the detective out with knife and hand was no small one, and the two pards kept at it with untiring energy.

The fire had disappeared and a cloud of smoke far away told where it was spending its force on the edge of the mesa.

The sun was high in the heavens, and its rays were beating with ten-fold force upon the blackened ground.

Captain Coldgrip was at last dragged from the living tomb by his two rescuers.

An exultant cry parted his lips when he planted his feet once more on the solid earth.

"This is one of the incidents of the hunt for the Spanish ophir, captain," said San Diego Dolph, who had watched him with a smile. "Do you hanker arter any more of the same kind?"

"In God's name, no!" said the detective, his awful experience rushing over him as he spoke. "Do you think it is to be duplicated, Dolph?"

"Not if I get my work in!" was the quick answer. "That Injun thar kin speak for himself."

"What do you say, Wizard Dick?"

The Apache's eyes suddenly caught a new glitter, and Captain Coldgrip felt a red hand close on his arm.

"Let Wizard Dick find the men who made the fire, and they will strike no more matches in the mesa grass!" he said.

"He means every word of that," said Dolph, glancing toward the Indian. "It ar' kind o' curious, captain, that the red who saved me from the vultures should help to rescue you from the fire. It is the unexpected that happens most—that's my opinion, anyhow. Whar do you think the fire-bugs ar'?"

The detective threw a glance toward the mountains.

"Gone back ter San Tonquin, eh?" continued San Diego Dolph. "Whar they ar', the prize must be, captain, and I'm itching to show a boss hand to this Satan in red."

"He would hardly venture back there so soon after killing Major Miguel. Gold Chick's tribunal may hold a perpetual session. You know these courts of the Southwest, Dolph?"

"Don't I?" exclaimed the vulture's victim. "Haven't I been proscribed by more than one in my time? I say that Injun Nick will go straight to San Tonquin, if he thinks the trail of the Spanish bonanza leads to it."

"It is yonder!" said Wizard Dick, raising his hand and pointing across the mesa.

"Then, back we go!" said Captain Coldgrip, coolly. "I never halt in the middle of a trail."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DETECTIVE ON HAND.

It is three days later, and the scene is San Tonquin once more.

The Red Lizard, which was the property of Major Miguel at the time of his failure to beat Injun Nick has passed into other hands, and the men who sit on the veranda in the gathering dust resemble its old frequenters.

The big tree in the plaza has been stripped of its human fruit and is ready for another batch of Apaches.

A new sensation has been found, and the bronzed men on the porch are discussing it over their cigarettes.

Somebody has found a new mountain mine nearly midway between San Tonquin and Santa Fe, and reports are saying that it was the long-lost Spanish bonanza. Of course the loafers at the Red Lizard hoot at this, but they do not fail to talk about the new "find" and its reported riches.

All at once a man reaches the veranda from the plaza and makes an announcement that creates a little flutter.

"Gentlemen, Padre 'Selmo has come back!" this man says.

"The Old Nick he has!" exclaimed a little fellow with a smooth face and intensely black eyes that snap viciously. "When did he come back?"

"I don't know. The padre's business is not mine. He is back again—that's all I know," and the speaker crosses the porch into the bar-room.

The little man walks down the main street and straight to the door of the Mummy's hut. It is shut and he knocks.

Father 'Selmo opens it quickly and holds it open, a silent invitation for his visitor to enter.

"I've been waiting for you—nearly two days," says the little man, when he had shut the door behind him.

"Who are you?" asks the priest, eying him closely.

"Dolores Dash from Santa Fe."

'Selmo takes the little lamp from the bracket against the wall and holds it almost against his visitor's face.

"You've never seen me before, so take a good look," says the man called Dolores, with a smile. "You are the Mummy of San Tonquin, and I've heard of you."

"Well, what is it?" asks 'Selmo, finishing his inspection.

"Where is Gold Chick?"

The question was sudden enough to make the little padre start; but he betrayed no emotion.

"Who is Gold Chick? Ah, yes—I have seen the man. He lives a good deal of the time here," said the padre. "How should I know where he is?"

Dolores Dash took a quick stride forward.

"I am sometimes called the Santa Fe Thunderbolt," he said, between his teeth. "I don't want to play fast and loose with any man, much less with you. You have come back from a mysterious disappearance. Some strange things happened here during your absence. Six Injuns were lynched by the pards of San Tonquin, Major Miguel was killed, and Gold Chick disappeared. Now, I don't care about the hangin' matinee; nor Major Miguel; I am Gold Chick's right bower; we have the same trail in common. I want to know where he is."

Dolores Dash's eyes took on a new glitter as he uttered the last words, and his right hand fell suddenly on the Mummy's arm.

"Do you accuse me?" asked the padre.

"Yes; openly and boldly!" said the Santa Fe Thunderbolt. "I have picked up a few threads since I came here, and I held several more before I left Santa Fe. A man doesn't have to have a personal acquaintance with you, Father 'Selmo, to know some of your tricks. One hundred years have sharpened your wits. You are more dangerous than a rattlesnake. Oh, I know you, and if I can't read your pedigree, I know a few things that might open your eyes."

The padre's reception of these words was somewhat ludicrous.

His parchment-like skin could not change to pallor, but his eyes showed that Dolores Dash had surprised him.

"Answer my first question now," continued the Santa Fe sport, who was not much taller than 'Selmo, although he was stouter. "Where is my old pard, Gold Chick?"

Instead of replying, the San Tonquin Mummy put on a look of injured innocence. He drew back as far as the sport's arm would let him, and kept his lips stubbornly sealed.

"Won't open your knowledge-box, eh?" ejaculated Dolores. "There is an argument that will open your mouth, and if you don't give me satisfaction in half a minute, I'll proceed to use it. Now, go on!"

Still, not a word from the little padre. His eyes seemed to recede deeper than ever into his head, but no syllable came from his wedded lips.

"All right! I see you want things brought to a crisis!" growled the Santa Fe sport, and the next moment the Mummy of San Tonquin was looking into the dark muzzle of a heavy revolver.

"Where is Gold Chick?" came over the weapon. "This is for the last time, my yellow Sphinx."

Father 'Selmo did not speak.

"Mebbe you think this is all scare," Dolores went on. "I know that I would have San Tonquin at my back if I should touch this trigger, but what's a town like this to a man who has been hunted by a dozen banded gold-camps? Won't tell me, eh?"

"Gold Chick is not 'Selmo's ward!" suddenly said the little padre.

"Of course not, but he has interfered with you. He came here for that purpose. Gold Chick is one of the Spanish bonanza fools, 'Selmo, but I am telling something you already know. Come with me."

"With you?" exclaimed the padre drawing back the length of the arm again.

"With the Santa Fe Thunderbolt!" was the answer. "If you refuse, by Jupiter! I'll empty your head with this dropper. I never play for fun. Come!"

He dragged the little man toward the door, and thence into the starlit space in front of the hut.

Father 'Selmo saw the little church between him and the stars.

"Beware of the vengeance of San Tonquin!" he said to Dolores Dash.

"To Hades with the Greaser town!" was the quick response. "I may have to face the whole lay-out one of these days, with your blood on my hands, but that depends on you."

Five minutes later the pair stood beyond the confines of the town, and Dolores Dash was taking 'Selmo, the Mummy, deeper into the mountains.

It was strange that the man who had handled Gold Chick with ease should quietly submit to this capture.

Perhaps he knew that Dolores meant exactly what he said—that he would not hesitate to shoot without mercy.

"We'll stop here," said the Santa Fe sport, halting at least nearly a mile from San Tonquin.

He still gripped the padre's arm and leaned forward with eager curiosity as he spoke.

"You will talk now without reserve," continued Dolores. "You need not keep your mouth shut any longer. Silence may be golden in some places, as they say, but here it means death. Gold Chick came to San Tonquin to find the way to the Spanish bonanza. He resolved in Santa Fe to find it within forty-eight hours after his arrival here. We have long been pards in this game. I used to have a friend named

Colonel Sloper of Stanislaus, but he got too smart and branched out for himself. Gold Chick was going to dog you this time. I am confident that he did so, and equally confident am I that you turned on him; eh, 'Selmo?"

"Just as you say," said the Mummy with provoking coolness.

"You can't play padre and guardian of the Spanish ore at the same time," cried Dolores.

"Not while I have a hand in the play!"

The little secret-keeper seemed to shut himself up like a snail in his shell, and Dolores Dash with a furious oath jerked him clear of the ground and shook him violently.

"I'll break every bone in your carkiss!" he hissed. "Where is Gold Chick?"

The silence which this time followed the question, seemed to transform the sport from Santa Fe into a veritable demon.

"So be it. We'll find the bonanza without you!" he said, in low but determined tones, and before the little padre could imagine what was about to take place, he jerked a black rope from beneath his braided jacket and threw it over his head!

"Mebbe you think I don't mean business," said Dolores, as a quick jerk tightened the cord about the padre's neck. "I served Camp Tartarus as hangman for three years, and my diplomas can be found to-day in the Shasta gulches. Come along, my San Tonquin cherub! If a silent tongue is your game, we'll meet it with a noiseless rope!"

'Selmo the padre was dragged mercilessly over the rough ground of the trail, until his persecutor found a tree whose lowest bough he could easily reach.

The next moment Dolores Dash coolly threw the black rope over the bough and Father 'Selmo felt it tighten under his chin.

He could not doubt now that the Santa Fe Thunderbolt meant business.

"I've pulled up Injuns, Chinamen, horse-thieves and Greasers in my time, but never a padre," laughed Dolores. "I've got a curiosity to see how one of the institutions kick the bucket. Still, I'll give you one more chance, 'Selmo—just one," and he leaned toward the little man whose toes were barely touching the ground.

The Mummy's eyes had grown suddenly to twice their usual size, and seemed almost ready to leave his head.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Dolores, heartlessly. "Christmas is coming, and I can't wait on your pleasure."

"Go on!" snapped the stubborn padre.

"Hang me, if I don't!"

Dolores stepped back and grated his teeth as he pulled on the cord wound round his right hand.

"This isn't the outcome I expected, but I won't let the yellow fox beat me," he said to himself.

"His last words mean that he knows where Gold Chick is, but that he won't tell."

Father 'Selmo left the ground rather suddenly at the conclusion of the last sentence, and his shaven head almost struck the bough above it.

Keeping the rope taut, Dolores Dash went forward and wrapped it several times about the limb.

"They'll have to advertise for another padre in San Tonquin!" laughed the Thunderbolt viciously. "The one who has just retired from business knows that Dolores plays no infant games. I'll go back now and accomplish two things—I'll find Gold Chick for myself, and keep Gerta from going to Santa Fe to see Colonel Smilax, alias Jack Brown of Brown's Valley."

He gave the swaying body of the padre another glance and started off with a light chuckle.

"Halt, and hands up!" rung out a voice at sound of which Dolores stopped in the open trail and threw one hand toward the revolver on his hip.

"Hands up is the order," said the same voice as sternly as before. "I give you a minute, Dolores Dash."

The stalwart figure in the trail not five feet away, the cocked revolver in his face and the animated eyes behind it told the Santa Fe Thunderbolt that there was one other person who played no "infant games."

Dolores drew back a step and elevated his big bronze hands.

"That will do. Now go back and cut your victim down!"

Dolores grated his teeth till they threatened to break.

"Go back, I say. About face, Dolores Dash. Cut down the person you have first pulled up. This is a big game for big stakes. As against you, I hold the best hand."

The covered man turned about with the sullessness of a beaten desperado.

"Who is that ice-cold sport?" he asked himself. "It seems to me I have heard that voice among the monte banks of Santa Fe. Have I got to cut the padre down? Yes; the man behind will scatter my brains over his trail if I refuse. But I hope the Greaser sphinx is dead by this time."

It was three strides back to where the padre

swung. Dolores Dash drew his knife as he neared the spot, and swept it once before his face.

The hanged padre fell to the ground with a dull thud.

"There!" said the Santa Fe sport wheeling upon the man who awaited him. "Now who are you?"

"Captain Coldgrip!" was the retort.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE BONANZA'S DOOR.

"CAPTAIN COLDGRIP, eh?" echoed Dolores, moving forward. "It's a name I've heard before, but I don't think I've ever met its owner. May I look at you, captain?"

"Certainly," smiled the New York detective. "I have no objection to an inspection on your part. Here I am, Dolores Dash."

The sport from Santa Fe leaned forward with a great deal of curiosity, and looked searchingly at the man who stood in the middle of the trail.

Captain Coldgrip gave him all the opportunity he wanted, and Dolores scrutinized him for several minutes.

"On the bonanza trail?" he suddenly asked, backing a step, but still looking at the detective.

"What if I am?"

"Oh, it's not much to me," exclaimed Dolores. "I thought, if you were on the old trail, you're only another hunter."

"Do you mean the trail of the Spanish bonanza?"

"Yes—it's the only thing worth looking for in this country."

"Did you get the secret from Father 'Selmo before you pulled him up?"

Dolores threw a quick glance at the little heap of very quiet humanity lying under the tree.

"He wouldn't open his head," he growled.

"The Mummy of San Tonquin fooled with Dolores a little too long."

"You wanted the secret, eh?"

"Not exactly the secret, but I've lost a pard."

"His name?"

"Gold Chick. He came to San Tonquin on the big trail, but he hasn't been seen for three days."

"Why hang the padre for that?"

"Can't you see through a sieve, captain?" cried Dolores springing forward. "My theory is that Gold Chick got hot on the trail, and, as a matter of course, he ran against the Mummy. I say that 'Selmo knew what he was, but he would not tell me. So I showed a deadlier hand than he wanted to see. Yonder he is, captain."

The detective walked to the tree, and bent over the padre's body.

"You did your work well," he said, turning a pair of mad eyes upon the Santa Fe Thunderbolt. "The Mummy of San Tonquin is dead."

"That's what I pulled him up for!" cried Dolores. "I never hang in sport, Captain Coldgrip. He could have saved his life with a word, but he would not. Now they can get another padre at San Tonquin."

For a moment the detective looked into the speaker's face, then he took a sudden stride forward, and halted within five feet of him.

"Go back to the hunt you have begun," he said. "I think you have complicated matters by hanging the padre. It was not a stroke of fortune, anyhow."

"Then why didn't he answer my question?"

"About your lost pard?"

"About Gold Chick."

"I don't know; but the future may decide that. Go back."

The last words were a command. Dolores involuntarily drew back.

"Have you any pards?" he asked.

"Wait and see."

"Is Injun Nick your right bower?"

A laugh broke over the captain's lips.

"Hardly, my friend," he said, with a broad smile. "Do you know the red rattler?"

"Don't I? Didn't he once come to Santa Fe and break three monte banks in one night? Didn't he meet Laredo Lot, the boss card-sharp, face to face, and pin his hand to a table with a bowie?"

"When was this?"

"About nine months ago."

"Since he left New York," the detective said to himself. "This man is a cyclone wherever he goes."

Then he said to Dolores:

"No; I cannot say that Injun Nick is my friend."

"He isn't anybody's," was the reply. "Like all of us, he wants to find the Spanish bonanza. When he left Santa Fe in the face of a howling mob, he rose coolly in his saddle and said he'd have enough to buy the town when he came back. We all knew what that meant. He referred to the Padre's Palace. He may be the worst fooled Injun in America, captain. He may never have enough ahead to buy the weeds of a Santa Fe common."

"That is true," said the New York spotter. "When you go back to San Tonquin you will continue your hunt for Gold Chick, won't you?"

"You can stake a thousand that I will," said Dolores.

"Very well. I am not going to say that I

hope you won't find him; the trail is broad enough for all the hunters in the Southwest."

Dolores Dash stepped back and turned his face from the man he had encountered.

"Hang me if I don't like that Captain Coldgrip!" he ejaculated. "Thar's an element of coolness about him that will take a man a great ways. If I don't find Gold Chick, why can't I strike up a pardship with him? We'd work well together, seems to me. He is the man who played a famous hand some years ago among the gold camps of Colorado. By Jupiter! he seems to suit me. Hope I may meet him again."

And Dolores walked back toward San Tonquin, leaving Captain Coldgrip alone with the padre.

"I will see whether I was mistaken," said the detective, stooping over the Mummy and pressing his pulse. "I thought I detected a sign of life a while ago, but I may have been deceived."

For several moments the starlight inspection went on and when the New Yorker looked up there was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

A minute later he was moving down the trail with the body of the little padre in his arms.

In a little while he found a horse already saddled, and mounting it with his curious burden he galloped away at good speed.

Father 'Selmo hung like one dead in the detective's arms. The open eyes had a wild, vacant stare, and he did not seem to breathe.

"I may have to thank Dolores for his night work, but I do not know," murmured Captain Coldgrip. "If either Dolph or Wizard Dick is at the mountain shanty, I will soon know the value of the find I carry in my arms."

More than two miles from the lynchers' tree and so deep in the mountain that a wolf could hardly have found it, Captain Coldgrip came upon a small hut such as a single prospector sometimes builds in the gold country.

He dismounted and opened the door.

"Dolph—Dick!" he asked but no voice answered him.

"Nobody here," ejaculated the detective. "I will have it all to myself." And he struck a match and lit a little tin lamp which he found on a rough shelf.

When he glanced at the padre again he was startled to see the vacant stare gone, and in its place a gleam of consciousness.

"Where am I, and who are you?" cried the little priest shrinking from the captain's grasp.

"I am one who is not likely to hang," was the reply, accompanied by an assuring smile.

"Where is the other one?"

"Gone. It was a close call, 'Selmo—about as close as the one I've lately had. Close calls seem to be fashionable in this country. How do you feel?"

The sallow hand of the Mummy of San Tonquin crept to his throat as if he expected to find the rope there.

"It isn't there!" laughed Captain Coldgrip noticing the movement. "We left it under a tree where Dolores played his game."

"Dolores! Ah! that was his name!" exclaimed the padre. "Did he go back?"

"Yes. He has lost his pard, he says."

The sleuth's quick eyes detected the slight start given by 'Selmo when the lost pard was mentioned.

"He thinks you hid his pard," continued the captain.

"He hid himself."

"But you know where he is?"

Father 'Selmo's little eyes glistened but he said nothing.

"Dolore did not guess wrongly," murmured Coldgrip. "This yellow mystery knows where Gold Chick is. What can I do with him?"

The San Tonquin Mummy had nearly recovered from the effects of his hanging. His life had been preserved by a miracle and his little throat showed the effects of the terrible choking he had undergone.

His escape was not through the hangman's mercy; Dolores Dash had intended well enough, but fortune had interposed to save the padre.

He looked more cunning than ever as he stood in the mountain hut before Captain Coldgrip. The door was shut, but the glassless window at its side admitted the mountain air and stirred the flame of the lamp.

"You wouldn't tell Dolores anything, eh?" commenced the detective.

"What had I to tell him?" was the response which made the New Yorker smile.

"He wanted to know something about Gold Chick's whereabouts, you know. That doesn't concern me, Father 'Selmo; but you'll play fair with the man who saved your life?"

A curious grin which told Captain Coldgrip that the sallow mystery was on his guard passed over the parchment face.

"What did you save my life for?" Why didn't you let me sleep where Dolores left me?"

"I saved you because he hanged you," said Coldgrip, and then he laid his hand on the padre's shoulder.

"Look at me—in the eye 'Selmo," he went on, his voice increasing in sternness as he advanced. "I am not in the San Tonquin country for nothing. I am one of those who have a desire to find the key to a certain secret which has been

guarded for years. You won't go back on the man who rescued you from the cord? I want you to tell me where the Spanish bonanza lies."

The last sentence did not startle 'Selmo in the least. The detective saw by his face that he was preparing for it, and that he would be fortified against it when it came.

But he was surprised by the movement which followed it.

All at once the Mummy of San Tonquin flew at the New York sport and gripped his arm like a vise.

"You want to know, eh?" he cried, his little eyes snapping like stars. "You save 'Selmo to make him tell you where the Spanish Mine is? What will you give him for the secret?"

"What is it worth?" asked the detective, looking down into the face before him.

"More than you've got, American," said the Mummy.

"Then you know the way to it?"

The padre drew back and stood before Coldgrip with suddenly folded arms.

"I can't choke anything out of him," muttered the sport detective; "that has been tried. I have to humor the mystery. He doesn't want to sell the secret although he has asked what I will give for it."

"The captain has nothing to give!" suddenly laughed Padre 'Selmo. "He is as poor as the others who are on the Spanish trail. Will he agree to give 'Selmo one half?"

"Yes," said the detective. "One-half."

The folded arms parted and dropped.

"Will the captain carry out 'Selmo's command?"

The mine hunter hesitated.

What sort of command would this strange being issue?

"I believe I can risk obedience," said the captain to himself. "I'll take the chances anyhow."

The next moment he spoke to the San Tonquin Mummy.

"I'll obey you, 'Selmo. Now, go on."

"Hands up," said the padre, elevating his sallow hand. "The captain will take the oath 'Selmo administers."

Captain Coldgrip held up his hand.

"The American swears by the living and the dead to make the Flower of San Tonquin his wife!" said the Mummy solemnly.

"Great Scot! not that!" exclaimed the sleuth. "That and nothing less, captain. The oath has been taken. You will refuse to obey it, at your peril."

"But I do not know this girl. I have seen her but once. You call her Gerta and sometimes the Flower of San Tonquin. I did not come here for a wife, but for the Spanish bonanza."

"Without one the other will prove valueless," said the padre. "Does the captain want the secret here?"

"Here!" was the quick response. "I can't get it a minute too soon, 'Selmo. The game may take new life from to-night. If you have the key to the Padre's Palace, give it to me."

Captain Coldgrip leaned over the little man, whose eyes were fairly burning.

"Tell me—quick!" he cried.

The next moment the lips of the padre parted, but not to pronounce the secret.

There came, instead of it, a sharp report, and with a hard cry 'Selmo the Mummy reeled away!

Captain Coldgrip wheeled toward the window, and saw through the shifting smoke a face he recognized.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VOICE UNDERGROUND.

THE next moment the sport detective stood in front of the shanty with a cocked revolver in his hand.

Nobody was in sight; the person who had shot the padre was not to be seen, and Captain Coldgrip used his eyes to the best advantage.

The detective did not seem to realize that he was giving some one a good target for his aim. His handsome figure was visible at considerable distance in the starlight, but the shot did not come.

After five minutes, the New York spotter went back into the hut.

The little lamp was still burning there and Father 'Selmo was lying on the floor, but not in the position he had left him.

The Mummy of San Tonquin lay on his face and his hand almost touched the log wall of the cabin.

Captain Coldgrip snatched the lamp and sprung forward.

Holding it down he turned the padre's face and saw in a moment that the mystery was dead!

There was no mistake this time; the bullet had succeeded where the rope had failed.

"This is disaster," ejaculated the spotter. "I was at the very door of the Spanish bonanza when the shot came; the secret was on 'Selmo's lips, but a devil shot it away. Hello! what is this—a pencil in the padre's hand?"

This discovery opened the spotter's eyes.

"He tried to write a message on the logs," he

continued. "I wonder if he succeeded? No! the pencil's lead is broken. Father 'Selmo failed. Curse the man who fired the fatal bullet!"

Captain Coldgrip got down and held the lamp close to the log nearest the Mummy's hand. He saw rude marks on its dark surface, and by degrees he studied out a word.

"It is a message!" he said. "What if it is the secret of the Padre's Palace?"

The spotter alone with the dead was laboring under intense excitement. He ran the lamp back and forth before the scrawl which showed that it was the last work of a death-smitten man.

At last the writing was deciphered, and the detective read a broken sentence:

"It is under the—alcove—the—Gold—"

That was all, and it looked like the padre's pencil and his life had broken at the same time!

"It isn't much of a clew," exclaimed the detective, starting up. "It is all I have, though, and I have to be content with it. I would give a thousand if life had remained with the Mummy another minute! The trailer shot a minute too soon."

Half an hour later the New York spotter was nearing San Tonquin.

The dead lay in the little hut among the mountains, and the penciling on the log had been carefully effaced.

Padre 'Selmo had played his part of the gold game through, and it had ended disastrously for him. If he held the key to the lost bonanza he would never use it for the benefit of others, and his swearing Captain Coldgrip to marry Gerta, was, as yet, one of his unexplained moves.

We will follow the New Yorker.

He entered San Tonquin in his true role.

He had quitted it as Gilded George, but now there was nothing to be gained by playing a false part, and he had made up his mind that from that time on he would play the gold game as Claude Coldgrip.

Avoiding the Red Lizard, he went straight to Gerta's house and knocked.

There was no response to his first rap and the second was answered by a young man who appeared suddenly at the detective's elbow.

"The girl what inhabits thet shanty ar' gone, boss," said the youth.

"Gone?" echoed Coldgrip.

"Gone, I remark. She went away last night on a hoss."

The captain showed his disappointment.

"Which way did she go?" he asked.

"She went toward ther Santa Fe trail, but whether she took it or not, I can't say. You're not ther only gent what wanted to see her to-night."

"Who is ahead of me?"

"A man I don't know. He wasn't very big, hed braid on his jacket, and—"

"Dolores!" ejaculated Coldgrip. "The sleek fellow is playing another game. He had to hang Father 'Selmo first."

The detective was about to walk from the house when the person who had volunteered this information came forward.

"You'll find this gent at ther Lizard," he said. "I saw him thar awhile ago. He ain't a Hercules, as I've said, cap'n, but he's got a tiger eye under his hat."

Captain Coldgrip laughed and walked away.

"I'll go up to the Red Lizard and see the lay-out there," he said to himself. "I want to know what Dolores is up to. I may have to deal harshly with this schemer from Santa Fe. If he is small, he may prove dangerous, but not like Injun Nick."

The cool spotter made no effort to conceal his features as he crossed the plaza and approached the veranda of the Red Lizard.

The night was warm and pleasant and more than a dozen men in dark shirts were enjoying pipes and cigars on the porch. Captain Coldgrip tried to ferret out Captain Dolores, but in vain. He looked into the bronze face of each lounge, but did not see the Thunderbolt's attractive features.

He crossed the porch somewhat disappointed, and entered the hotel.

The bar-room was well filled with smoke which the light wind had wafted in from the veranda, and here and there the detective could indistinctly see the figures of men.

At that particular moment, the man whose duties were behind the counter, had nothing to do. He saw Captain Coldgrip from the moment of his entrance, and kept his eyes upon him.

The look, which was an uncommon one, drew the detective to the counter.

"Colonel, do you b'lieve in ghosts?" asked the barkeeper, leaning suddenly across the counter and speaking in a low whisper.

"What do you mean?"

"Pretty much what I've said. I've got something on my hands, and it's something ghostly enough to be a nine-days' wonder for San Tonquin, if I choose to let it out."

"Do you intend to give it to me?" smiled Coldgrip.

"I do. I heard it as plainly as I hear my own voice. By Jupiter! I never knew there was a graveyard under the Red Lizard."

Captain Coldgrip started slightly at the last sentence.

"Come behind the counter."

The New York sleuth, wondering what was to be the outcome of this singular adventure, soon stood beside the barkeeper and among his wares.

"It was heard in the cellar," he continued, opening a door in the floor. "I came down after liquor and heard it for the first time."

The sport-detective went down the short flight of stairs in advance of the bartender, and the two men stood in the little cellar of the Red Lizard.

"Maybe it won't operate for us, colonel," said the clerk. "We'll wait awhile and see."

There was all this time an incredulous smile at Captain Coldgrip's lips, and the barkeeper's earnestness seemed to increase it.

The silence of the candle-lit cellar with its dim outlines of casks and barrels was somewhat ghostly. It was not broken by a single sound.

For five minutes the two men occupied one spot, Captain Coldgrip erect, and the clerk stooping with his ear inclined toward the ground.

"There! Don't you hear it?" the latter suddenly exclaimed looking up at the detective. "Tell me there isn't a man somewhere under us, will you?"

The detective got down and put his ear against the ground.

For a moment he heard nothing, and then he heard a human voice faint and far away.

At first he was inclined to discredit the evidence of the acute senses, but he was forced to believe the truth.

"What do you say now?" cried the clerk and barkeeper of the Red Lizard.

"That is a human voice," said the captain slowly.

"But how did it get there?" was the puzzling question. "It is under us and almighty deep, too."

Captain Coldgrip listened again.

Away down in the ground a voice was sounding, not in intelligible language, but in a series of shouts, or the echoes of some.

"Have you told anybody about this?" asked the detective confronting the clerk.

"No one. I had just come up from the cellar when you dropped in. What do you think it means?"

"I can't say."

"Somebody is under us?"

"Yes."

"A man?"

"I think so."

"It annihilates me! when I first heard it, hang me, if I didn't jump six feet. It was like exploding dynamite under my boots."

"Who is missing from San Tonquin?"

"Nobody."

"Are you certain? think again."

"I remember now that we haven't seen Gold Chick for three days, and a man dropped in about sundown and inquired after him. But you don't think the man under us is Gold Chick, colonel?"

"I don't know who he is."

"He's got to be rescued if it takes all San Tonquin!"

"San Tonquin need not play any kind of a hand in the rescue game," said the detective with some sternness. "You will not speak of this singular find to a living soul above us without orders."

The clerk flushed.

"Orders from whom?" he cried.

"From me!" said Coldgrip.

"What's in this game?" asked the clerk, as his eyes which were small took on an eager glare. "Say, colonel, isn't this a side show to the Spanish bonanza circus some-how-or-other?"

"Do you think it is?" smiled the detective.

"When I see men like you in San Tonquin and men like the man called Dolores, I believe something is up. The man under us is imprisoned. Don't it strike you that he may be in the bonanza?"

Captain Coldgrip did not start.

"This man is getting too inquisitive," he said to himself. "He must know that he is not to blow this discovery all over this Greaser town. If Gold Chick is missing, I know where he is, and I know, too, why Padre 'Selmo did not tell the Santa Fe Thunderbolt."

"We will go back now," he said to the barkeeper. "You will keep a still tongue in your head. If it wags it will be the worse for you. You have only to keep in mind that Captain Coldgrip issues this command. Come, now!"

The clerk looked into the detective's face and saw firm resolution in his eyes.

"I'll do it," he said.

A minute later Captain Coldgrip stood once more in the bar-room of the Red Lizard.

He gave the clerk an admonitory glance as he passed from behind the counter, and joined the occupants of the room.

"That's the man there!" suddenly rung out a voice and a man stepped forward and covered the detective with outstretched hand. "I've followed him from Jim Thomson's old cabin in the mountain where he left Padre 'Selmo, your

favorite padre, dead as a smelt! Ask him if this ain't so! Ask him if he didn't blow out the light and run away from the priest. I know what I'm talking about. I charge that man with the murder of the Mummy of San Tonquin!"

The man was tall with black eyes and a swarthy skin. His dark pants were thrust into the tops of his boots and his clothes were those of the rancher. But Captain Coldgrip knew him for all this.

A silent but excited crowd backed the speaker; the pards of San Tonquin looked into the detective's face with eyes that fairly snapped.

"Don't you see?" continued the accuser. "He stands thar like a man struck dumb. You kin bet your last ounce that the blood of your padre is on his hands!"

Then it was that the New York spotter seemed to find his tongue.

He suddenly drew his splendid figure up and covered the stranger with his finger.

"That man is Nugget Nox, Injun Nick's pard and he lies like a thief!" he said.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LIAR AND HIS LIE.

"I've got to meet that man with his own weapons," said the detective to himself, just before he pronounced the emphatic denial. "Nugget Nox is playing a bluff game of his own. Injun Nick did not send him here, but he is here on his own hook."

A silence followed the spotter's words, and the crowd behind Nugget Nox looked at him with varying emotions.

"I expected something of that sort," he said, coolly, with a contemptuous curling of his lips. "He hopes to get rid of the accusation by calling me Injun Nick's pard, as though that war a crime. If I war Injun Nick himself, that would not lessen his crime at the mountain shanty. Go thar an' find the body of your padre, pards of San Tonquin. When that man found he couldn't choke anything from 'Selmo, he left him dead. That's all. I've done my duty."

Nugget Nox stepped back and threw a glance toward the door leading to the veranda. The way was blocked by the stalwart figures of half a dozen men.

"What d'yer say, cap'n?" asked one of the foremost toughs. "You've heard what's been said. Is the padre lyin' dead at the Thomson shanty?"

"He is," was the quick confession.

"That man dared not tell the truth. Padre 'Selmo died by a bullet that came in at the little window. Ask Nugget Nox whose finger touched the trigger."

"A counter-charge, gents, you see!" laughed the detective's accuser. "What'd I drop the San Tonquin Mummy for?"

"Why did your master, Injun Nick, kill Major Miguel?"

Nugget Nox started; the question was unlooked for; it came like an arrow straight from the bow.

"Injun Nick isn't my master!" he suddenly cried. "I owe nobody any allegiance. If I am to be noosed on a counter-charge, here I am, men of San Tonquin. A desperate man will resort to anything. That is Captain Coldgrip, adventurer, desperado, assassin! The blood of Padre 'Selmo is on his hands. He intends to find the Spanish bonanza if he has to kill every step of the way to its portals. Let him go scot free if you want to—it is nothing to me! I came here in the interest of justice. I thought you liked your padre, but I don't know what to think now."

The coolness of the man who had subjected him to the tortures of the burning mesa, amazed Captain Coldgrip.

Nugget Nox was bent on his destruction; that was certain.

His last words drew the crowd forward.

"Will you stand trial?" asked the foremost man.

"On that man's accusation?"

"Yes; thar's no other."

A sudden flash in the spotter's eyes told that the crisis was at hand.

"Yes, I'll stand trial," said the detective, beating down certain words on his lips. "You can bring the dead here. I ask that you keep Nugget Nox till this has been done."

"I'll stay of my own accord," said Injun Nick's man. "You won't see me running away from court, captain."

As the doorway was clear at that moment he went out and lit a cigar on the veranda. A little man was already watching him, and before the second puff had been taken Nugget Nox felt something touch his arm.

"Ho! what is wanting?" he asked, looking down into the face at his side. "I don't believe I have the honor of knowin' you!"

"I am Dolores Dash," was the answer, and then the speaker laughed. "That was a good game of bluff!"

Nugget Nox started.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Why, the game you just played inside—the one ag'in' Captain Coldgrip."

"Game of bluff, do you call it?" asked the Indian's lieutenant, angrily. "You don't think I made a false charge, eh?"

"I—that is, I won't call it that exactly, but I don't see how a dead man can be murdered!"

"You don't, eh?" ejaculated Nugget Ned. "I can't understand you. Of course a man can't be killed after he's once dead—"

"That's what I thought," smiled Dolores.

"What do you know, then?"

The Santa Fe Thunderbolt, fresh from the padre's last adventure, as the reader knows, drew Nugget Nox out into the plaza before he spoke again.

"I appreciate your motives," he said to Injun Nick's right bower. "I see that Captain Coldgrip has interfered in a game of yours."

"Well?"

"I see, too, that you want him out of the way," continued Dolores. "The stake of all the big games in this country is that everlasting Spanish Mine. It brought me here!"

"You?" cried Nugget Nox.

"Yes, Dolores Dash, of Santa Fe. I had to laugh when I heard you tell San Tonquin that the Mummy died at the hands of Captain Coldgrip."

"Well, he did!" snapped Nugget Nox.

"Maybe he did," said Dolores, doubtfully.

"You doubt it?"

"By Jupiter! I have a right to!"

The Indian's pard gave the little sport a fierce look, and seemed to recoil a step.

"I'll tell you, Nugget Nox, as they call you," he went on. "I ought to know how the padre cashed his checks. I hanged him myself!"

"You did?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Since sundown."

"For what?"

Dolores laughed.

"Because he was stubborn," he said. "I hanged him till he was dead as a door-nail."

"All right," said Nugget Nox, with a mischievous grin. "Go into the Red Lizard and tell the pards of San Tonquin this."

"Jerusalem, no!" cried Dolores, drawing back. "I'm no fool!"

"Yes, come along," said Nugget, catching his arm. "If Captain Coldgrip is innocent, he ought to escape. So you're the man who killed Padre 'Selmo? I'll escort you back and the tiger crowd will be delighted to hear your confession!"

Dolores uttered a cry and broke from his persecutor's grasp.

"I'm willin' for your bluff game to win," he said to Nugget Nox. "That man is the greatest obstacle in our way. Do you think they'll condemn him when the padre is brought in dead?"

"What else can they do?"

"He will again the charge deny."

"And I will reiterate it!" said Nugget Nox, shutting his teeth hard. "Mine is a bluff game, sure enough, Captain Dolores, but I will play it through with a vengeance. Can't I use you?"

"As a witness?"

"Yes."

"What must I swear to?"

"You saw Captain Coldgrip and the padre together near the mountain hut; you—"

"Please excuse me," interrupted Dolores. "I did see them there, but it was after he made me cut the padre down. I don't want to face that sleuth-hound any more to-night."

"Afraid, eh?" sneered Nugget Nox.

"I don't want to face him," repeated Dolores. "I hope your bluff game will win, but he may rely on something that may block the whole scheme!"

"What can it be?"

"I'm not prepared to say. I'll bet my head that Captain Coldgrip hasn't played the last hand he is capable of playing. He took your charge too coolly for a man at the end of his cord."

"I'll meet all his plays," said Nugget Nox calmly, and then he leaned toward Dolores and continued quickly: "Whar's your pard?"

"That's what puzzles me," was the answer. "I've lost Gold Chick and that is why I pulled Padre 'Selmo up."

"When did you see him last?"

"A few days ago at Santa Fe. When I got here he was gone."

"Do you think he left San Tonquin?"

"I don't think he left it of his own accord."

"Why not?"

"Because the padre gave me to understand that Gold Chick has fallen into a trap of some kind."

Nugget Nox's eyes suddenly dilated and got a new glitter.

"Gold Chick came here to run the bonanza secret down, eh?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"And you followed him for the same purpose?"

"I did."

"With what result so far?"

"I hung the padre and got no information."

Dolores spoke these words with the bitterness of a disappointed man.

"Do you intend to keep on the trail?" Nugget Nox asked.

"I do. It is a free-for-all race; the best horse rakes in the yellow stakes."

"What kind of a pard would I make?" And the Indian's pard straightened before the Santa Fe Thunderbolt and showed him his magnificent figure.

"You understand that Gold Chick and I ar' pards," said Dolores.

"You'd like him best, hey?" laughed Nugget Nox.

"It is natural that I should. We've been pards a long time. My old pard, Colonel Jove Sloper of Golden Gulch, left me in the lurch a year ago."

"Come with me. I don't have to go back to the Red Lizard till they bring 'Selmo's corpse' in. Then there'll be a holy picnic, I suspect."

A moment later Dolores was following Nugget Nox down the dark little streets of San Tonquin wondering whether he was being conducted.

Did the Indian's lieutenant know anything about the mystery surrounding Gold Chick's disappearance?

A few yards beyond the last cabin Nugget Nox halted suddenly and wheeled abruptly upon the little man from Santa Fe.

"Captain Dolores, I suggest that you give up your mine-hunt here and now!" he said speaking so sternly that the Thunderbolt recoiled.

Nugget Nox followed him up.

"I mean what I say, and you needn't jump out of your skin because I've said it," he went on, his fierce eyes glaring at the astonished man. "Thar's a thousand too many on this one trail. The Spanish bonanza isn't big enough for everybody. I suggest that you retire from the play."

"You don't mean that?" exclaimed Dolores despite the tones he had just heard.

"I mean nothing else. Here! you want to start for Santa Fe immediately."

"I object to this! I said awhile ago that the trail is big enough to accommodate two."

"It is too narrow for two!" grated Nugget Nox. "About face, Dolores!"

"Did you conduct me here for this?"

"Yes—fool!" laughed the Indian's pard.

"You will proceed to make yourself scarce about San Tonquin. You may have played many a game in your time, captain, but none exactly like this. However, if you'll go back to the Red Lizard and tell the crowd thar that you hung Padre—"

"I'll never do that!" was the quick interruption.

"I thought not. Then, you go to Santa Fe. If Gold Chick is whar I believe you think he is, he'll be found in the course of time. Come, captain. You don't want to force me into a side play here. They'll soon be in with the padre, and I've got to be on deck. Here we are! About face! All aboard for Santa Fe!"

Captain Dolores ground his teeth as the hand of Nugget Nox turned him about.

"I've got no horse," he said.

"You look stout enough to tramp it," was the retort. "Now march!"

Dolores had looked at the big tough's hand and seen a revolver there.

"The rattlesnake has got me," he said to himself. "He can drop me before I can touch my six-shooter. I've got to make a pretense of obeying him, but may I see Satan to-night if I go to Santa Fe from his hands!"

"Remember! no coming back!" said Nugget Nox. "This is my playground for the present. Thar will be no Captain Coldgrip in the way by daylight, and I don't want to be bothered by flies like you. I'm playing a hand unknown to Injun Nick. If he knew the trap the New York sleuth is in, he'd get him out just to play a game of his own."

Dolores made no reply, but gave Nugget Nox a final glance and walked away.

"Now, I'll go back and see my scheme out," said the Indian's right bower, aloud. "The padre's body, with a bullet-hole through it, will turn San Tonquin upside down, and Captain Coldgrip won't have one chance in ten thousand. I planned the scheme all through before I struck. By Jove! I was in luck when I came back here. I left the captain doomed in the Grande Mesa; but he is here. Now let Injun Nick keep his distance, and we'll get a lasting grip on the Spanish purse. It takes Nugget Nox to play a game like this!"

Five minutes later Injun Nick's bronze pard was in sight of the Red Lizard again.

CHAPTER XIX.

SATAN SUCCORS HIS OWN.

CAPTAIN COLDGRIP had but one thing to do, and that was to wait coolly until the body of 'Selmo, the little padre, was brought in from the mountain cabin.

He saw Nugget Nox leave the bar-room with vengeance in his last glance, and then he leaned against the counter knowing that he was a prisoner.

Some of the toughs went out and smoked and whispered on the porch, but the greater part remained in the room, and watched the detective.

It was plain to see that the accusation had had a startling effect, also that it had not affected all alike.

The detective's charge that his accuser was

the pard of Injun Nick, the slayer of Major Miguel, had prejudiced a few against Nugget Nox, but if the majority believed the cool captain guilty, he would have to fight them all.

Once the barkeeper went down into the cellar, but did not remain long.

When he came up he leaned across the counter in a careless manner, and said to the detective:

"It's all quiet down thar now, captain. I listened with all my might, but nary a voice did I hear under the ground."

Coldgrip made no reply.

"Shall I go down an' listen ag'in?" said the clerk.

"It isn't necessary," said the prisoner at length, speaking over his shoulder.

"Just as you say. I'm keeping my mouth shut about them voices underground, but I'm getting almighty anxious."

"Wait."

Nugget Nox had come back to the Red Lizard, but Captain Coldgrip did not see him for he was on the porch outside.

"What'll you swear ter when the padre comes?" asked a man who confronted Injun Nick's pard rather suddenly.

"To what I've already said—that the man in the hotel wiped him out."

"Did you see it done?"

"Why not?" demanded Nox, somewhat irritated. "D'yer think I would swear to something I didn't see?"

"Men don't do that often, pard; I war jes' askin', yer know. It's a bad thing—ter kill a man like 'Selmo."

"Because he's a padre?"

"Not exactly that. He ar' San Tonquin's landmark, war hyer when ther first shanty grew. Ther old prophecy that our luck goes when he dies may amount ter a good deal. If you saw ther man at ther bar kill 'Selmo, why thet settles it."

"You'll hear from me when I'm wanted," said Nugget Nox, glancing toward the watched detective.

The questioner drew back and looked into a comrade's face.

"What do you think of it, Luke?" he asked, in a low voice.

"The man lies. It is a set-up job. I would bet a thousand that he didn't see Captain Coldgrip shoot 'Selmo," was the answer. "If he is Injun Nick's pard, he wants the prisoner out of the way. But what kin we do? The crowd's ag'in' Coldgrip."

"Dead set ag'in' him. I'm afraid we can't help him."

A little while afterward four mounted men drew rein before the Red Lizard. The crowd on the porch moved forward, and stood breathless in front of the horses.

One of the men carried something human in shape across the saddle, and the next moment he lowered it into the arms of the foremost men in the crowd.

"It is ther padre! it is Father 'Selmo!" went from lip to lip, and there was a craning of necks forward and curiosity was seen in the dark eyes on every side.

The Mummy of San Tonquin had come back with his lips sealed forever, and the stamp of death on his parchment-colored features!

A subdued growl of rage and vengeance went over the hard looking assembly in the plaza, and swift glances went toward the hotel.

If somebody had cried "vengeance!" at that moment a hundred mad men would have rushed upon the New York spotter.

The corpse of Father 'Selmo was carried toward the Red Lizard and somebody rolled a blanket into a pillow and placed it on the spot where it was deposited on the porch.

"Ther body ar' hyer," announced a tough to the crowd in the bar-room, and two men took Captain Coldgrip's arms and led him out.

The crowd involuntarily drew back and the lamp with its polished reflector threw a good light upon the scene.

Captain Coldgrip looked down into the face of the little padre, and then elevated his eyes and threw a searching glance through the crowd.

"Whar is Nugget Nox?" asked a loud voice.

Injun Nick's lieutenant was standing within six feet of the speaker.

His eyes were riveted upon Captain Coldgrip and the triumph of a desperado gleamed in their depths.

"Nugget Nox!" the voice repeated.

"Here!"

The men of San Tonquin looked at the sport as he stepped forward, and his eyes encountered the cold gaze of the man from New York.

"Is that man the person you call 'Selmo?" asked the individual, who seemed to lead the proceedings.

"That is the man," said Nox.

"You saw him killed?"

"Yes."

"By ther prisoner hyer?"

"Swear that man!" rung out the voice of Captain Coldgrip. "I will not let my life slip away at the end of an unsworn sentence. If this is a court, give it a form. I demand that the witness shall be sworn."

"That's fair," said several voices in the crowd.

"It's man ag'in' man, tharfore let oath meet oath."

Nugget Nox stood silent amid these words.

"Hand up, captain," said the leader to him.

Injun Nick's right bower shut his lips hard behind his drooping mustache and raised his hand.

"I'll play the game out with the hand I've got," he said to himself.

A strong oath in not very good English was administered, and Nugget Nox was asked to tell the story of the padre's death.

He folded his arms, stepped back a couple of paces and began.

"This man is doubly dangerous," muttered the astonished detective as Nugget Nox proceeded with a deftly coined story every word of which seemed to have been weighed beforehand. "He swears beforehand to a lie made up for the occasion, but I will entangle him. Let him go on. If he swears me into the halter I will give him the credit of being the most successful liar on earth." And Captain Coldgrip continued to listen calmly to the infamous falsehood as it grew majestically before the crowd.

Nugget Nox took good care not to exhibit any feeling against the detective. He knew, or seemed to know, that there were men in the crowd whose sympathies were with Captain Coldgrip, and he tried to avoid show of personal hatred.

His was a story which we do not intend to repeat here in detail.

He said he had seen a light in a cabin in the mountains, that it had attracted him, that he had approached it to see two men there, Captain Coldgrip and the padre; that the captain had demanded something which was given up, and that the little padre fell back, shot dead by the detective!

This was the substance of Nugget Nox's testimony.

He had nothing against the prisoner; oh no! He wanted justice done—that was all.

The testimony was followed by a moment's silence.

"What's yer reply?" said the head of the court to Captain Coldgrip, who did not look like a prisoner at the bar.

The question started the man of the cold hand into life. He fixed his eyes on Nugget Nox.

"You saw me shoot the padre, eh?" he said.

"Yes."

"With what?"

"Your revolver."

"This one?"

The detective drew a revolver and held it up.

"That is the one," said Nugget Nox firmly.

"You swear to it?"

"Yes."

"Very well," and Captain Coldgrip glanced at the leader. "I ask that the ball be taken from the padre's body."

The request caused a flutter of excitement.

Nugget Nox seemed slightly confused, but did not move.

"It is an old test, gentlemen, continued the detective, and may prove nothing. The death bullet may have passed clear through the padre. If found I am willing to offer it against the evidence of the witness, along with a plea of 'not guilty.'"

"Give the prisoner a show. Search the body for the bullet," said some one in the crowd.

"I've no objections, gents," said Nugget Nox who had control of himself and in whose eyes was a gleam of satisfaction. "It'll never be found," he went on to himself. "I know what a revolver can do at six paces."

The lamp was taken down and placed on the floor beside the padre and two men went to work.

The pards of San Tonquin looked on with much curiosity and Nugget Nox and the cool detective were not the least interested of the spectators.

For twenty minutes the border surgeons searched for the ball among the padre's vitals and just when one-half of the crowd was about to despair of finding it, somebody ejaculated "found!" and one of the searchers held up something between finger and thumb!

Nugget Nox started at sight of it, but was soon himself again.

He was disappointed.

"Here is one of my bullets," said Captain Coldgrip extending a conical piece of lead toward the court. "Weigh the two, and remember that the witness saw Father 'Selmo shot with the revolver I hold in my hand."

It was almost thrilling to see man after man balancing the two bullets on their bronze fingers, and mentally calculating the difference in weight.

The crowd was the jury and amid profound silence each man made the test for himself.

At last the two leaden spheres came back to the leader.

"What's the verdict, gents?" he asked glancing over the crowd.

"One o' them balls ar' lighter than the other," said a voice.

"Ther captain's ar' ther heaviest."

"What do you say?"

The question was addressed to Nugget Nox himself, and when the bullets were extended toward him he took them sullenly.

"That man weighs his own bullet on one hand and mine on the other," suddenly said the detective.

The whole crowd started, and none less than Nugget Nox, from whose hands the bullets fell to the floor!

"Gentlemen, I saw his face in the smoke of the weapon that killed Father 'Selmo," continued Coldgrip. "The bullets convicted him. The pard of Injun Nick is playing the biggest game of bluff a man ever played. I saved your padre from the noose of one man to see him shot from my hands by the revolver of another. The last one stands before you!"

Nugget Nox threw one hand toward his hip, but somebody caught it there.

The crowd surged toward him with a storm of oaths and shouts.

He threw up one hand and pushed the foremost back.

"Give me a chance and I'll expose the bullet hoax!" he shouted. "The prisoner will not face the new testimony I can produce!"

But the crowd did not seem to hear a single word. The Indian's lieutenant was seized by a dozen hands, and as many revolvers looked him in the face.

"To the tree!" "Death to the perjured hound!" "Swing him from the limb that bore Apache fruit!"

It was another wild scene for wild San Tonquin.

Nugget Nox was in the iron grip of men whose blood had been heated by the Mummy's death.

It was a miracle that he was not shot to pieces where he stood.

All at once somebody uttered a cry that startled every one.

"Jehu! ther Injun! Great Scot! Injun Nick himself!"

Sure enough, a new actor had appeared on the stage; a horse had halted at the very edge of the porch and the lamp showed every one the fierce visage of the Scarlet Hercules.

In the twinkling of an eye he swooped toward the man held by a dozen hands. He thrust a revolver into the faces of the crowd.

His left hand fell like eagle talons upon Nugget Nox's shoulder, and as he jerked him away he opened on the thunderstruck pards of San Tonquin.

Men tumbled right and left!

CHAPTER XX.

INJUN NICK'S NEXT PLAY.

THE sudden appearance of Injun Nick on the scene was in the nature of a revelation to Nugget Nox. He had expected to be shot to pieces by the mad crowd, whose hands held him like vises, and rescue was the last thing he looked for.

As we have said, men tumbled right and left before the red-skin's revolver.

When Nugget Nox got his breath he was no longer on the veranda of the Red Lizard, but beyond the boundaries of San Tonquin, and a hand gripped his collar.

"What have you done?" said a voice.

The Indian's pard looked at the speaker, and saw the scarlet whirlwind by whom he had been saved—Injun Nick himself!

"I was playin' a cool game against our worst enemy," he said.

"Against Gold Chick?"

"Gold Chick be hanged! I was buckin' Captain Coldgrip."

Injun Nick uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Not that man? We left him on the mesa!" he exclaimed.

"I can't help that. I guess I know the New York sleuth-hound when I see him. He is back yonder, all the same."

"Who saved him from the fire?" asked the Indian through clinched teeth.

"His Satanic Majesty, I presume. For a minute I thought he had a hold on me to-night!" grinned Nox.

Injun Nick did not smile, but his dark face grew more sober than ever.

Nugget Nox saw him throw a flashing look toward the plaza, as if he wanted to go back there and try conclusions with his old antagonist.

"What were you trying to do with him?" suddenly asked Injun Nick.

"I was doing my best to get his head into a San Tonquin noose!" was the answer.

"By what means?"

"I swore that he killed the Mummy."

"What! Father 'Selmo?"

"Yes."

"Did he do that?"

"Would I say so if he didn't?" snapped Nugget Nox.

"Then, why didn't you convict him? The galoots of San Tonquin had you when I came up."

"Captain Coldgrip turned 'em ag'in' me," growled the white pard. "Just when I thought I had him booked for the lasso, things went the other way. It was the unexpected what hap-

pened; it always does. I guess those fellows would have finished me if you hadn't come up, captain."

"Undoubtedly," said Injun Nick, and then he was silent for a little while.

"Are you sure the padre is dead?" he asked.

"Dead as Andy Jackson!"

"Then his secret is lost. We must find the lost bonanza without him."

"It looks that way, if it is found at all."

Injun Nick started.

"Do you give it up?" he ejaculated leaning suddenly toward Nugget Nox. "If you do, remember that you can step aside. I want no cowards, no faint hearts with me. If the hand of Captain Coldgrip has any terror for you, you can go."

"Wait till I resign," said Nugget Nox. "When I swore to go to the end of this trail, I meant every word of the oath. I say plainly that I don't like the reappearance of this Yankee sleuth, but I am not discouraged. Say the word, Injun Nick, and you'll see Nugget Nox march back into the cage where the tigers are growling for his blood."

The Indian gave the speaker a look of approval. He did not intend to lose the services of his bronze right bower; he could not afford to dispense with them.

"If the padre is dead, we must try another game. He may have transferred his secret to his ward, the Flower of San Tonquin," said the Indian.

"I doubt it. That old fellow had 'secretiveness' written all over his face."

"I shall try the new scheme."

"What! see Gerta as she is called?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Now."

"With all San Tonquin looking for you with finger at the trigger?"

"Of course."

Nugget Nox could not conceal his amazement. Brave as he was he considered it the height of folly to go back among the infuriated men whose comrades had been shot right and left by the Hercules in red.

Of course they would be on the alert.

The eagle's swoop had fired their blood, and they would shoot on sight the red-skin who had killed six men in five seconds.

"I am with you, captain," said Nugget Nox to the Indian. "Shall we go back together?"

"No. I go alone."

"To Gerta's house only?"

"Yes."

"It might be well to keep away from the hornets' nest for the present. You know where the girl lives?"

The red-skin nodded, and laid one hand lightly on his lieutenant's shoulder.

"You will find the boys in camp three miles down the trail," he said. "I don't ask you to wait for me here. Injun Nick is able to take care of himself even among the men-tigers of San Tonquin. I have met this Captain Coldgrip before. Go to the boys, or remain here—just as you choose. I am going to the Flower now."

The Indian's hand was removed and Nugget Nox saw him go back toward the town.

"Cooler than Jericho, and more merciless than Satan," said the sport, as he watched the vanishing figure. "He will get the gold secret one of these days. A tiger like him can't fail. I am going to stick to him. If it had not been for the difference between the bullet they took from the padre, and the kind Captain Coldgrip uses, I'd have won the game I had in hand awhile ago. A few grains gave me away, and turned the tables. Jehu! if the Injun hadn't come, I'd not be here now."

Injun Nick had already disappeared, and was gliding down the narrow streets of San Tonquin, which had another eventful night on its hands, and was all excitement on the plaza and beyond the steps of the Red Lizard.

He did not act much like a man whose life was at stake every minute.

He carried no revolver cocked in his dark red hands, and did not glide crouchingly like a spy from shadow to shadow.

Injun Nick, cool, determined and stealthy, seemed to know whither he was going, for he went straight toward a little house and knocked lightly at the door.

A moment later his quick ears caught the sounds of light footsteps beyond the portal, and then the door was opened slightly.

"What has happened?" asked a silvery voice, as a hand held the door open for the red-skin to enter. "I heard shots toward the plaza awhile ago. Have the Indians—"

She stopped suddenly, and shrunk back without completing the question, for at that moment she caught sight of her visitor's face.

Gerta was a statue of astonishment.

She stared at Injun Nick, but said nothing.

"Wasn't looking for me, eh?" said the Indian, with a faint smile.

"No," said the girl.

"I am Injun Nick, and if you will treat me white, I won't be your visitor long."

"What is it you want?"

Injun Nick stepped forward and stood in front

of the Flower of San Tonquin. He looked at her several moments before he spoke again.

"Don't you know anything about what has happened to-night?" he asked.

"I know nothing. I have just come back."

"Ah! then you have been away?"

"I have been to Santa Fe."

"Alone?"

"Alone!"

"Something important must have taken you there."

"Something very important," said Gerta, quickly.

"Did you succeed?"

"I failed. Injun Nick; you are one of those men who know nearly everybody. I have heard of you. Did you ever hear of a man called Colonel Smilax?"

"Colonel Smilax of Santa Fe?" ejaculated the red.

"Yes!" said the girl eagerly.

"I've seen him a hundred times!"

"What do you know about him?"

"Nothing much. I once discovered that his name isn't Colonel Smilax, but that didn't concern me."

"It concerns me!" exclaimed the Flower of San Tonquin.

"In what way?"

"I do not like to tell you now, but do you know for certain that his true name is Brown?"

"I know it to be that."

"Is he the original Jack Brown of Brown's Valley, California?"

"That's a funny question!" laughed the Indian.

"It is everything to me," said the girl.

"Is it more important than the secret of the Spanish bonanza?"

"A thousand times more so!" was the swift reply. "Father 'Selmo would give it up for the truth about Colonel Smilax."

The Indian seemed to retreat a step.

"I wish I had known this last night," he said.

"It is too late now."

"Too late?" echoed Gerta, losing color. "In what way is it too late?"

"The padre is dead!"

The beauty of San Tonquin uttered an exclamation that startled a man leaning against a window outside.

"Dead! Father 'Selmo dead? Impossible, Injun Nick!"

"It is true. I left him at the Red Lizard."

"Whose work is it?"

"Captain Coldgrip's, they say."

Gerta looked like a person suddenly fastened to the floor.

"Now, with the Mummy dead, what is the secret to you, my girl?" said the Indian, seizing Gerta's wrist and drawing her suddenly toward him.

"You want it?"

"Yes. This is a free-for-all game. The Spanish bonanza exists and you know it, my child. You have the secret Father 'Selmo guarded so well."

Gerta drew back the length of his arm and looked into his face.

"He never gave me the secret," she said.

"Beware! I did not come here to fail!" said the Indian fiercely. "The trail is mine to win and won it shall be. Go on. The padre left you, his ward, the secret of the lost mine—"

"He left me nothing of the kind," persisted Gerta.

"I'll lift the mystery of Colonel Smilax for the secret. Secret for secret, girl."

Was this man telling the truth? Did he really know about the man, to see whom she had gone to Santa Fe over the Apache trail and through the dominion of the read-agent?

Gold Chick's last act before he descended into the unexplored shaft was to dispatch a man to Santa Fe with a message to Captain Dolores, saying that Gerta contemplated a journey to Colonel Smilax. Now, Dolores himself was near if not in San Tonquin, and Gerta had failed to find her man in Santa Fe.

For several seconds she tried to read the Indian with a scrutinizing look.

Was he playing a game of deception?

"Very well," said Gerta at last. "If you know the truth about Colonel Smilax, out with it."

"In exchange for the gold secret?"

The girl hesitated a moment.

"Yes!" she said with a suddenness that startled the Indian.

Injun Nick's eyes brightened, and he looked like a man whose diplomacy has succeeded.

"Colonel Smilax is the original Jack Brown of Brown's Valley. I discovered this accidentally but none the less certain."

"Were there two Jack Browns?"

"No."

"Thank Heaven!" cried the girl with fervor.

"The time will come when I will not be nameless. I would sooner have a name than all the gold of a dozen Spanish Mines."

"What is this man to you?" asked Injun Nick.

"Wait and see!" was the reply. "I wish Padre 'Selmo were alive to hear this revelation. Woe to the man who took his life! Captain Coldgrip is no better than the rest who want the lost nuggets."

"We're all gold wolves—none better than the other," smiled Injun Nick. "Now, my child, you will give me the secret. Fair play is all I want."

The man at the window seemed to hold his breath, and intense desire filled his little eyes. He listened as man had never listened before him.

"The padre kept his secret even from me," said Gerta, "but I believe I have discovered it."

"Of course you have, if you say so," was the answer. "Injun Nick will take your word, girl."

"You go to Father 'Selmo's little church," continued Gerta, dropping her voice to a whisper.

"Yes."

"You enter the little alcove behind the altar."

"What then?"

"There is a trap-door there. Try it!"

The Indian's eyes snapped.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STARTLING BY-PLAY.

"WHAT is under the trap-door?" asked the Indian.

"A dark shaft which I have never explored."

"Then you don't know its depth?"

"I do not know."

"I will soon find out!" was the exclamation.

"Injun Nick will never forget this service, Gerta. He has given you secret for secret. You ought to be satisfied."

"I am. If what you have told me is true, I am richer than if I owned a dozen mines like the Padre's Palace."

"I prefer the Spanish bonanza," smiled the Indian, and a moment later, without warning, he walked from the house, leaving the Flower of San Tonquin alone.

The man outside of the window hugged the dark side of the house and watched the red-skin.

He shut his hands and muttered something while his eyes sparkled with brilliance.

"What does San Tonquin think about the killing of Father 'Selmo?" the girl asked herself.

"Injun Nick says the man called Captain Coldgrip did it. Where is he?"

Gerta was soon on the street, with the houses of the town about her.

She looked toward the plaza and for once heard no loud voices and saw no lights.

What caused the silence if San Tonquin knew that Padre 'Selmo had been murdered?

Perhaps, after all, the Indian had deliberately stated a falsehood.

With a resolute look in her eyes the young girl went toward the Red Lizard. A few men, unusually quiet, were on the porch. A strange hush seemed to fall over the entire town.

"What has happened, Nerry Nat?" she asked the first man she encountered.

"What! Don't you know, Gerta?"

"No."

"Six men."

She remembered the shots she had heard.

"What about the six men?"

"Killed!"

"By whom?"

"Injun Nick."

The beauty of San Tonquin could not suppress an exclamation of horror.

By Injun Nick? Why, that man had just left her house! she had just talked with him!

It could not be!

"Mebbe you don't b'lieve it," the man went on. "Do you want to look at his victims and count 'em on yer fingers?"

"No."

"I never saw such shootin', and I've seen a good deal of daisy trigger work," Nerry Nat went on. "He did it all for the man we had in our claws."

"Captain Coldgrip?" asked the girl eagerly.

"We had him, too, but the man for whom Injun Nick got in his work was Nugget Nox, his right bower, I judge. D'ye know, Gerta, that that work has kinder paralyzed San Tonquin? I never saw the old town like it ar' ter-night. The six dead men in their Red Lizard couldn't be stiller than the town."

"Where is Father 'Selmo?" asked the girl.

"Oh, we took him to his shanty."

"He was dead?"

"Dead!"

"Captain Coldgrip killed him, I am told."

"Captain Coldgrip? Who told you that?"

The girl hesitated.

To tell the truth would be to acknowledge that Injun Nick had visited her since the terrible swoop upon the porch, and to acknowledge this might help out the confession of the exchange of secrets. She recoiled from anything of this kind.

"I must have dreamed that Captain Coldgrip is accused of killing the padre," she said.

"Was he accused?"

"He was, and by a man who got the tables turned unexpectedly upon him. We had the right man in our hands when Injun Nick came. Hello!"

The speaker looked up and saw a man whom he recognized.

"What's the latest, Berdan?" he asked this individual.

"Nothing. We can't track them. Injun Nick has got clean away; so has Nugget Nox. This is the beginnin' of the end, Nat. Please excuse Berdan Buck."

"Thar goes a coward!" hissed Nerry Nat, glancing toward Gerta as the man moved off. "This shootin' has made more than one. I've heard a dozen men say since, thet they ar' goin' away. The Spanish bonanza has kept San Tonquin up for ten years. With 'Selmo dead an' the secret gone, what ar' thar to keep anybody hyer?"

"Nothing but vengeance," said the girl.

The man laughed at the answer.

"Nobody wants ter stay for thet," he said.

"Gerta, you'll have ter hunt up a new friend, now that the padre is gone. If one is wanted, call on Nerry Nat."

The girl thanked the dark-shirted rough, but did not see the little eyes that were closely regarding her from behind one of the wooden pillars of the porch.

The watcher was a small man whose curiosity was very great, and he leaned forward to catch the words passing between Nerry Nat and the girl.

At length Gerta drew back and stepped from the porch.

"I am now told that Captain Coldgrip did not kill the padre," she murmured. "Nerry Nat puts the crime on Nugget Nox, the man whom Injun Nick saved."

"I guess that's right," said a voice.

The Flower of San Tonquin stopped and turned to confront a man who stepped toward her with the last word on his lips.

"I say, I guess Nerry Nat told the truth," he repeated. "But that is not here nor there, girl. I want to see you."

"Here?"

"Nowhere else."

Gerta remained in her tracks with her eyes riveted upon the man who came forward.

"You had a visitor awhile ago," he went on.

"What is that to you?" was the quick demand spoken with a good deal of spirit.

"A good deal, maybe. Your visitor was the red bolt that struck up at the Red Lizard awhile ago."

"Well?"

"You made a trade with him."

"With Injun Nick?"

"Certainly. He told you about Colonel Smilax, and you told him how to find the Spanish Mine. In short, girl, you gave the whole secret away."

Gerta stood astonished before the man.

How did he know all this?

"Come! I don't want to frighten you out of your wits," the little man went on. "I know all that happened at your house to-night, all but a few words and they are what I want now. What did you tell Injun Nick?"

The girl drew back, but as quick as an eyelash drops, there was a hand at her wrist.

"I don't tell you!" she said.

"Oh you don't, eh?" laughed the man maliciously. "You tell a bloodthirsty Injun but you don't whisper anything to Dolores."

"Dolores? Is that your name?"

"It is."

"Then I repeat that I don't tell you anything," said Gerta with renewed resolution.

"You draw the line at Injun Nick, do you?"

"In a case of this kind, yes!"

Captain Dolores leaned forward and gave the Flower of San Tonquin the benefit of his flashing eyes.

"I like a game with a good deal of snap in it," he said to her. "You've got it in your eyes and on your tongue, but you can't eucher the Thunderbolt of Santa Fe. Tell me what you told Injun Nick just before he left or—"

"Or what?" asked Gerta coolly.

"Or I'll proceed to get it by conquest!" was the retort.

"Then get it!"

She drew her figure up and looked straight at him.

Dolores bit his lips and showed his disappointment.

"Here's an unexpected halt, but it sha'n't last long," he said to himself.

"The girl shall not keep me from the secret she gave Injun Nick. I must find Gold Chick. I am confident that she sent the red to where he is, but they must not meet. Captain Dolores, you must not let a girl like this defeat you in the bonanza game."

All at once he drew Gerta toward him and said madly:

"For the last time, you won't tell me?"

"I will not!"

"Nor for the truth about Colonel Smilax, of Santa Fe?"

"I know enough about him."

"But you have not found him."

"Not yet, but I will."

Captain Dolores's fingers tightened on Gerta's wrist.

"Not a cry, not a signal!" he said, sternly.

"San Tonquin will see another cool game if I am interfered with. The Spanish bonanza is the stake for which twenty men are fighting. The best one will win. I am going to take you to a certain place where you will tell the truth

or suddenly play your part of the gold game through."

The man from Santa Fe was a dangerous human tiger if he was not great of stature.

He had the strength of a giant and the agility of a leopard. His resolution, too, was remarkable.

Gerta found herself being led forcibly from the scene of her capture by this man.

She looked into his eyes, but saw no mercy there.

It was all for the Spanish bonanza, which had been the curse of New Mexico. Men had fought like lions for the mystery which they were never to solve, and the Padre's Palace was still one of the secrets of the mountains.

Captain Dolores was almost dragging Gerta down the narrow street when somebody stepped toward him and said sternly:

"Halt!"

The girl could hardly suppress a cry of exultation, and Dolores threw one hand toward his belt.

"Let the girl go and look to yourself," continued the same voice, addressing Dolores, and the Santa Fe sport looked into a revolver that glittered in the starlight. "If you don't know me, let me state, parenthetically, that I'm San Diego Dolph, one of the bonanza fools. Drop the girl's wrist, captain!"

Dolores ground his teeth, and obeyed the last command with reluctance.

"Now, about face—march!" continued Dolph. "You'll walk straight into the clutches of my pard, but the claws ar' velvet ones, an' won't hurt if you don't fool with 'em."

The sport from Santa Fe, thus suddenly deprived of his prize and with the tables turned on him, was forced to face about which he did in no good humor.

As he walked away, he caught sight of a lithe figure that suddenly took motion.

"Great Scot! another Injun!" he cried.

"Wizard Dick, the Apache," said a soft-sounding voice, and the next moment he was in the power of a young buck, with intensely black eyes and almost entirely naked to the waist.

"Are you in the game?" asked Dolores, as the Indian confronted him.

"Wizard Dick is in the white man's game," was the answer.

"They'd better pit you against Injun Nick. It would be red an' red," laughed Dolores.

"Find Injun Nick by-an'-by. He was here-to-night."

"I should gently remark. Six men in six shots ain't bad. Am I your prisoner, Wizard Dick?"

The young Apache replied by dropping his hand upon Dolores's shoulder, and the following moment the Santa Fe sport saw a pair of real Indian eyes before him.

"Say, Wizard Dick, what 'll you do for a grip on the bonanza?" said Dolores.

"What you know?"

"Enough to get a hold on," was the reply.

The Apache glanced toward the spot where Gerta and San Diego Dolph were last seen. They were gone.

"Maybe I can bribe this red with a slick lie," muttered the sport. "Give me a chance and I won't stay long in his hands. I think I've already sent one shrewd arrow home. These Apache thieves know gold when they see it."

Then he looked at the Indian again.

"Let's go pards in the bonanza business," he said. "I know where the Spanish 'find' is, Wizard Dick. You've only got to—"

The next instant the Indian's hands leaped at his throat and closed there like a spring vise.

"Jehosaphat! I played the wrong string!" gasped Dolores. "See here. I was only trying you, Wizard Dick. I don't know a blamed thing about the Spanish—Hades and horns!—that's—all the—throat—I've got!"

The next moment the young Apache was dragging a man away with the strength of a jungle tiger.

His black eyes blazed and he did not stop until he halted before a man who had heard him coming up.

"Here, captain, is a man who says he has the key to the gold bonanza!" said the Indian, and then he threw Dolores at the feet of the person he addressed—Captain Coldgrip.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PARTING OF A ROPE.

"WHAT do you know?" asked the spotter of the breathless man dropped suddenly at his feet by Wizard Dick.

"Nothing; by Jupiter, not a thing!" was the reply.

"He has lied, then!" hissed the Apache.

"I was only tryin' the red," said Dolores, with a grim smile. "Nothing more, I assure you, captain."

By this time Captain Coldgrip had recognized the man.

He had not seen him since the attempted lynching of the padre.

"You are still on the trail, Dolores?" he said.

"Not so much on the bonanza trail as I want to find my pard, Gold Chick. If I can find him

I'll coax him to leave this hunt. By Jingo! it's an unsafe trail, to say the least of it. One moment you are covered by a revolver and the next gripped by an Injun buck. No more of it for Captain Dolores, if you please."

The detective could not keep back a smile; Dolores seemed in earnest.

"Go and find Gold Chick," he said.

The Santa Fe sport looked surprised; Wizard Dick's eyes brightened madly.

"This is more than I expected after being dragged here by the Injun," said Dolores. "Is he your pard, captain?"

"Yes."

"And the man called San Diego Dolph, too?"

"He is my friend also."

"A pretty cool pair in my opinion," was the answer. "You three ought to be able to find the Spanish bonanza, but I don't know."

"Don't let it trouble you, Dolores," laughed Captain Coldgrip. "I hope you will find Gold Chick. Good-night."

Captain Dolores drew back, and when once beyond the spot he quickened his gait and struck a bee-line for San Tonquin.

"If they call this a diversion I don't want it repeated," he said to himself. "Between Dolph and the Apache, I don't crave any more pleasures like it. That infernal Injun! I wonder if I can't get even with him? Why not set San Tonquin against him? The town wants the three Apaches who got away the night they lynched the gang on the plaza; and this may be the identical one who opened his battery on the crowd. I feel his red fingers at my throat now. By the shield of Jupiter! I'll put the yellow dogs on his heels!"

Dolores did not halt until he reached the Red Lizard. A dozen men, tall, stalwart and desperate-looking, were in the little bar-room.

"Gentlemen," he said, "if you want the Apache demon who killed in the plaza the other night keep your eyes open. He is near. I have just escaped from his clutches. Look at my throat. Doesn't it bear the marks of fingers? Shoot the first Injun that shows up in San Tonquin and you have him!"

The announcement brought out many an oath of hatred and revenge, and the toughs gave Dolores to understand that Wizard Dick or any other Indian would be shot on sight.

"I guess I'll get even by proxy!" ejaculated Dolores when he walked elated from the Red Lizard. "It is better than not getting thar at all. I'm no clam if I was born on the sea-shore, and no Injun holds a big hand against me long. Now, the next job is to find Gold Chick. The girl, Gerta, was taken from me by one of San Diego Dolph's unexpected plays, and just when I was going to force from her the same words she gave Injun Nick. I believe I'll drop Dolph on sight for that trick. Nugget Nox hasn't showed up since the old Satan jerked him from the San Tonquin pards on the Red Lizard's veranda. Jehu! what a picnic Injun Nick made! I'm glad I was only a spectator."

Captain Dolores proceeded on until he reached the vicinity of the little church presided over by Padre Selmo in his lifetime.

He knew that rough but kind hands had carried the corpse of the little man to his humble hut, and that Cortez, the young padre, had doubtless arrayed it for burial. If Captain Dolores had thought that the secret of the Spanish bonanza was somehow attached to the dead he would not have invaded the sanctity of the death-chamber; he had hanged the padre until he believed life extinct, and he wanted nothing more to do with the Mummy and the mystery of San Tonquin.

A brief hour had passed since he had seen Injun Nick leave Gerta's house with a secret of some kind in his possession. During that time he had encountered San Diego Dolph, Wizard Dick and the detective; he had escaped alive from the clutches of all, and he had warned the town against the Apache buck.

If he had known that Captain Coldgrip had heard a human voice beneath the Red Lizard's little liquor cellar, he would have proceeded thither with curiosity on the alert.

He was anxious to find Gold Chick.

A short time ago the secret of the Spanish bonanza seemed within his grasp; now it appeared as far off as ever.

Dolores cursed his ill-luck as he stood, he knew not why, near the little church with the greater part of San Tonquin at his back.

All at once a footfall fell upon his ears and his quick eyes caught sight of a human figure.

The Santa Fe sport drew back instinctively.

"Somebody's coming," he murmured. "By Jove! he's going to enter the church itself."

Captain Dolores had eyes keen enough to let him see the man who opened the door and glided inside.

"That is Captain Coldgrip," he said to himself. "He told me that he would find the bonanza. Is he on the trail now? Jehosaphat! I'd give one-half of it to have Gold Chick with me now."

The detective had already disappeared; the door of the padre's little temple was shut between him and Dolores.

The Santa Fe Thunderbolt drew his revolver and went forward.

A strange bravery seemed to animate him now.

"If I read the Mummy aright when I was dealing with him, I'll find Gold Chick where the bonanza is," he said. "If you lead me to it, Captain Coldgrip, so much the better."

The door opened without noise, and Dolores was soon inside and in the midst of a gloom that seemed palpable.

If he had followed at the heels of Claude Coldgrip he would have been guided to the small altar at one end of the church, and thence to the little alcove behind it.

"I am going to try a new trail," said the detective. "The only alcove I know is this one. It may be the one referred to by the padre when he scrawled the last message on the logs of the mountain hut. I may find nothing or much. If Nugget Nox had held his revolver a little higher, Father Selmo would have lived to divulge the secret of the Padre's Palace. We'll meet one of these days, my chief of torture, and then there will be a final settlement."

Captain Coldgrip had a coil of rope in his hand.

He drew forth a little wax candle and lit it. The flame dimly revealed the quaint surroundings; it did not show the man, breathless and eager a few yards away, with his finger at the trigger of a revolver.

The detective moved the light over the floor of the alcove and found certain significant marks about a crack.

His eyes glistened at the discovery.

"This is a trail of some kind," he said. "I may send Wizard Dick to-morrow to the nearest telegraph-station with a dispatch for New York. Colonel Cantwell must have exhausted his patience, and Estelle—she must have given me up for dead!"

The knife-blade inserted into the crack lifted a board, and the next moment the detective had raised a trap-door under which yawned a shaft black as rayless midnight.

Captain Coldgrip leaned over the edge and listened.

Silence was the only reward.

After a while he uncoiled the rope and fastened one end of it to an immovable piece of furniture near by.

The other end he dropped into the shaft.

Captain Dolores was watching these proceedings with eyes that did not miss a single movement.

"Shoot me for a gopher, if I haven't struck it rich at last!" he ejaculated. "I shall share the discovery with nobody. I'm glad Gold Chick isn't here. Dolores, you're in luck; boss luck at that!"

The man from New York tried the rope before he concluded to trust himself upon it.

The look that brightened his eyes told the single spectator that he intended to descend into the shaft. A thousand dangers could not keep the cool detective back.

All at once the New Yorker placed his bowie between his teeth, just as we have seen a certain man do before him and under similar circumstances, and a moment later he had lowered himself over the edge of the abyss.

Captain Dolores almost sprung forward at his display of daring, but something held him back.

He had better wait until the gold detective was well down the shaft.

"He must be down now," said the impatient sport. "I can judge the depth of the shaft by the candle he carries." And away he went toward the little alcove.

It took him but a minute to reach it, but instead of leaning over it, he drew back, with a white face turned toward the door.

Jerusalem! what's up now?" he ejaculated. "Who is this coming down the aisle to take a hand in my game?"

The Santa Fe Thunderbolt drew back and watched the match which somebody had struck a few feet away.

It came toward him with a good deal of speed, and in a minute he was gazing from his retreat upon the last man he wanted to see on that spot.—Injun Nick!

The red-skin uttered an exclamation of rage when he saw the trap-door open.

His eyes got the infuriated glitter of a tiger's, and Captain Dolores hugged the wall of the little alcove.

What if the Scarlet Hercules should find him there?

The Indian saw the rope that reached into the depths of the shaft; his glaring eyes noticed the vibrations which told that some living body was on it at that time.

"Somebody is ahead of Injun Nick!" cried the red. "It may be the sleuth-bound from the East. If it is, he will find the Spanish bonanza to his eternal cost. The mesa has given up its captive, but Injun Nick is still on deck!"

Captain Dolores saw the Indian light another match in the expiring flame of the first.

The following moment his right hand drew a bowie.

"What is the red devil going to do?" flashed through Dolores's mind. "He does not want to cut the rope if he has none of his own. That Injun is capable of doing anything. Great

God! he is going to knife the cord, and with Captain Coldgrip not half-way down, per-haps!"

The last sudden action of the Indian had told the horrified Santa Fe sport what he was going to do.

Injun Nick, with a pair of eyes that seemed on fire, was leaning over the shaft.

A naked knife glittered in one hand, and the match flared in the other.

Captain Dolores leaned forward in the excitement of the moment and held his breath.

He saw the Indian clutch the swaying rope and steady it, then the knife-armed hand darted at it like a scorpion and—

A wild cry came up from the depths of the shaft!

The rope was cut and Injun Nick was holding one piece in his red hand!

Captain Dolores could not keep quiet.

The cry from below found an echo in the one that parted his lips.

Injun Nick sprung up like an awakened tiger.

The Santa Fe sport recoiled to the wall of the little alcove, where the match, flashing up again, showed him to the Indian.

"I've got to fight for life," exclaimed Dolores. "Hang it all, why didn't I shoot the red Satan before?"

He threw up his revolver and thrust it into Injun Nick's face, but quick as he was, the thunderstruck red was the most agile.

A hand sweeping upward struck the captain's arm and the revolver sent a bullet whizzing toward the ceiling overhead!

Injun Nick laughed satanically over his triumph.

"So you are the pard of the man in the shaft, eh?" he said in Dolores's face. "Do you want to follow him?"

"For God's sake no!" cried the Santa Fe sport. "That man wasn't my pard. I don't know where he is. The man on the rope was Captain Coldgrip!"

Injun Nick laughed again.

"Then he has found the Spanish bonanza!" he said. "Captain Coldgrip, sport, tiger and detective, is at the end of his trail. What the fire of the mesa failed to accomplish, one knife-cut has succeeded in doing. You are Captain Dolores, of Santa Fe. Ah! I know you. You want to make Gerta believe that Colonel Smilax is not the true Jack Brown of Brown's Valley. I have told her the truth."

"You?" cried Dolores. "In Satan's name, how did you know?"

"I find everything out," was the answer, accompanied by a grin. "I am going to make you my helpmate, captain."

"Me?"

"Yes. I shall send you down this shaft to see what has become of the sleuth from New York."

Captain Dolores retreated, with an exclamation of terror; but the vise-like grip of Injun Nick prevented his escape.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WAIT WITH A BOWIE.

WE must not lose sight of the imprisoned worthies, Colonel Sloper and Gold Chick, whom we left several chapters back in the depths of the old mine, supposed to be the long-lost Spanish bonanza.

The manner of Gold Chick's getting there is known to the reader, who has also heard Colonel Sloper's brief account of his misfortune.

"Are we to perish here?" asked the colonel, when the main shaft had been explored again without finding any avenue of escape.

"A thousand times no!" was the quick reply.

"No cage holds Gold Chick long."

"But this is a cage of stone. It has held me six months."

"You are crippled for life. The devil who calls himself a man of God has fixed you beyond hope of escape without assistance."

Colonel Sloper ground his teeth and cursed the padre roundly.

"If this cage is not going to hold you, I'd like to have you force the door," he said to his companion. "You don't know what may be transpiring over head. The trail-dogs, with this Captain Coldgrip, must be fighting for the bonanza; they may force the secret from Padre Selmo. In that case, a part of the play will be transferred here."

"I wish it would be!" cried Gold Chick. "It would give us a chance. Let us try the corridor which, you say, ends under the Red Lizard."

The two men found a narrow passageway which ascended gradually, and when the end had been reached Gold Chick, who had iron lungs as it were, raised his voice in a series of shouts.

Again and again he called, but the stony ceiling seemed to throw back his words with a mocking echo, and when he desisted Colonel Sloper took it up and shouted for help.

These were the voices heard by Captain Coldgrip and the barkeeper of the Red Lizard in the cellar of the hotel.

When the two underground captives had ex-

hausted themselves, they went back down the corridor and held another council.

But hour after hour passed and no sound broke the stillness of the mine.

Gold Chick leaned against the wall of the shaft which he had descended from the little alcove far above and waited with a desperado's impatience.

The walls were too hard to cut with a knife, and the first attempt told him that no steps could be made upward by that means.

"What does the Spanish bonanza amount to if I am to die in it?" Gold Chick asked himself again and again. "It is no more to me under these circumstances than an acre of treeless llano. If Captain Dolores knew my condition, he wouldn't remain an hour in Santa Fe even though Gerta is to come thither on hunt of Colonel Smilax. The man shut up with me here cannot help me. I wish the padre would come back for I'd give a thousand to have my hand three minutes at his throat."

The Mummy of San Tonquin at that moment in peril himself did not oblige Gold Chick by appearing in the cavern, and the boss of the town was forced to swallow his rage and chagrin.

"Did the Mummy always come by way of the shaft?" Gold Chick suddenly asked his fellow prisoner.

"I don't know. He appeared when I was not looking for him."

"You have watched the shaft, haven't you?"

"As well as I could in the darkness."

"But he never came down while you watched?"

"Never."

"He may have another entrance," exclaimed Gold Chick taking hope.

"I'd like to see it," said the hamstrung man. "I wish I could tell you how I went out of this place. A glimpse of daylight would make me forget my suffering. Why, I'd frighten the camps of Shasta land were I to go back looking as I am. Nobody would call me the handsome Colonel Jove Sloper who used to run things thar with an elevated hand. I believe I'd be willing to have a grizzly chew me up to see the crown of old Shasta for one living minute."

Colonel Sloper was full of expressions like these. Whenever he talked he gave utterance to them until at last Gold Chick found despair eating into his soul.

What if the padre would never come back?

The gold sport always got started afresh by this mental question. It goaded him to new attempts at finding a way out of the underground prison, but the result was ever the same.

"I wonder what ever became of my old partner?" Colonel Sloper said once.

"What partner?"

"Captain Dolores."

Gold Chick uttered a quick cry.

Strange to say he was thinking of Dolores at that moment.

"We were pards when I first threw myself fool-like on this deadly trail," the maimed colonel went on. "After awhile I thought I had a clew and then the bonanza became too small to be divided. It is always thus, eh, Gold Chick? Would you be willing to divide this find if you had it fairly in your hands?"

Gold Chick started.

"Just now I'd give half of it to be out of here!" he exclaimed. "What do you think it is worth?"

"More than all other bonanzas bunched," was the answer. "There used to be a man in Brown's Valley named Jack Brown. He was a queer stick in some respects. He claimed to have a deed for the Padre's Palace. I believe he had some old papers which he guarded with a good deal of care, but he never showed them to anybody."

When Colonel Sloper paused Gold Chick was leaning forward listening with devouring interest.

"Go on," he exclaimed. "What do you know about this man from Brown's Valley?"

"He lost his papers one night—his 'mine deeds' as he calls them," the colonel continued. "He had talked about them a little too much. There were twenty men in camp at that time who wanted a share in the Spanish Bonanza. The loss of the papers threw Jack Brown off. He raved about them till he fell into a fever, after which he seemed to have forgotten everything about them. He didn't call himself Jack Brown any longer, but got it into his head that he was Colonel Smilax. He left the valley between two days and turned up a month afterward at Frisco as Colonel Smilax still. It is a singular case."

"Who got his papers?" asked Gold Chick.

"We never knew exactly. A little dried-up specimen of humanity was seen near the camp a few days before the theft; after it he was seen no more."

"Father 'Selmo!' ejaculated Gold Chick to himself, and then his hand felt in the darkness till it touched the arm of Colonel Sloper.

"Was this Jack Brown or Colonel Smilax ever married?" he asked.

"He used to talk about a daughter somewhere, but we thought it was like a good deal more of his talk."

"A daughter, eh? What did he call her?"

"Gerta," said the colonel promptly.

Gold Chick made no reply.

"There is no mistake about it now," he said to himself. "I am almost glad I came here, for I am establishing the fact that Colonel Smilax is the father of the Flower of San Tonquin. I think Colonel Sloper has told me all he knows about the case. He doesn't know, of course, that Jack Brown is now in Santa Fe; he says the last he heard of him was at Frisco."

The next moment the voice of Colonel Sloper was heard again.

"Did you ever run across this Colonel Smilax in your travels?" it asked.

"I cannot say—I have seen so many odd characters," said Gold Chick cautiously.

The maimed captive of the mine said no more for a minute.

"Odd characters?" he suddenly repeated. "The woods are full of them." And then he laughed as if recollection had brought several before him.

A laugh in that dark place had a weird sound to Gold Chick's ears.

It reminded him where he was and brought back his terrible situation.

"I'm going to get out of this!" he cried. "By the eternal heavens! I will not stop till I have found a way! The padre won't come, therefore I will go to him and show him the iron grip of Gold Chick!"

"When will you see him?" asked the colonel.

"Too soon for his health!" flashed the sport.

"How did he produce the effects that startled me after he threw me against the wall?"

"By magic of some kind."

"You saw the circle of light on the wall and the friar's head in it?"

"Yes."

"And you don't know how he produced it?"

"I do not."

"Satan himself must be mixed up in it somehow. Do you think you have shown me all the apartments of this labyrinth of gold and darkness?"

"All I have ever penetrated myself," was the answer.

"There must be more!" exclaimed Gold Chick.

"Find them, then."

Five minutes later when Colonel Sloper spoke again he got no answer.

He felt the gloom about him and called his companion, but the echo of his own words was the only response.

Gold Chick had departed on the errand uppermost in his heart. Feeling his way from wall to wall he entered room after room.

It was an eager man's hunt for an avenue to freedom; the imprisoned eagle was sounding the bars of his cage.

More than once he halted, picked up rough pieces of rock and weighed them on his hands.

"Gold! the whole thing's gold!" he exclaimed fifty times. "The Padre's Palace is no myth. I am actually in it, but as a caged bird. Great Caesar! is there but one door out?"

He crept along ledges in the gloom, and threaded more than one corridor, all the time cursing the Mummy of San Tonquin, and wondering what had transpired overhead since his imprisonment.

At last he turned back.

The whole interior of the mine had been explored, and his hands had led him to no outlet.

All at once he stopped and laid his hand on his knife.

Something was certainly coming toward him.

Gold Chick did not know where he was; he might be near the spot where he had left Colonel Sloper, or he might be far away.

What if it was Father 'Selmo?

Gold Chick waited with feelings wholly indescribable.

If the maker of the slight noise was the padre, the cage-door should open, or he (Gold Chick), would know why.

The sport wound his fingers resolutely about the hilt of the bowie in his right hand.

"I'll solve the mystery in a minute," he said in a whisper. "This is a game in the dark, but it may take me to daylight."

The next moment the gold-sport was startled by a sigh of despair.

It seemed to come from a spot directly in his front.

He sprang forward with a light ejaculation.

"Is it you, colonel?"

"Yes," said the voice of Colonel Sloper, and then, as his hand clutched Gold Chick's leggins, he continued:

"The shaft is open, captain. There is a candle burning at the top."

These words went like a knife through Gold Chick.

"The padre at last!" he cried. "Where is the shaft, colonel? Show me the light and we'll get ready for the Mummy of San Tonquin."

"It is only a few yards away," and the two men went back through the darkness, their eyes burning like stars for mad eagerness.

Gold Chick soon knew that he was once more in the perpendicular shaft, for far ahead a light burned like a star.

After awhile he elevated his hands and touched a rope. There was no doubt in his mind that

Padre 'Selmo, the demon padre, was coming back.

"What are you going to do, captain?" whispered a voice at his feet.

"I will show you when the yellow Satan comes!" was the reply, and Gold Chick, with one hand on the swinging rope and another around the bowie hilt, waited for his prey with upturned face.

Somebody was coming down the rope, hand over hand, and quite slowly, but surely all the same.

The light was descending with the person.

"Look! another light!" suddenly exclaimed the mutilated colonel.

"I see it!" said Gold Chick in a whisper. "But I want the man on the rope! He belongs to us, colonel, as surely as he lives!"

Gold Chick dropped the rope and stepped back.

In another moment he would clutch the man almost within his reach.

He suddenly threw up his hand to grasp him, and just then something unforeseen occurred.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DETECTIVE'S DESPERATE GAME.

A HEAVY body came down the shaft and struck Gold Chick a crushing blow.

Crushing it was, because the sport was thrown against the wall, and the next second staggered into the corridor leading from the shaft, unable to articulate a single word!

The man on the rope had fallen, and for the most excellent reason—the rope had been cut by some one above!

"In God's name, what has happened?" ejaculated Colonel Sloper, who felt a body pitch headlong over him. "What kind of a thunderbolt was it that came down the shaft?"

There was no reply; the silence of death reigned in the dark place, but the maimed bonanza-hunter could see a glimmer of light far overhead.

The reader has already divined what had happened, for he has seen Injun Nick cut the rope by which Captain Coldgrip was descending the shaft.

A few feet from where Colonel Sloper stood, wondering what had happened in the dark, the New York detective was recovering from the sudden tumble which miraculously had not cost him his life. The change had occurred so unexpectedly—the rope had been severed without warning—that he had no time to prepare for it, and an involuntary cry had followed the catastrophe.

Gold Chick had fallen senseless twenty feet from the spot where he had been struck. Colonel Sloper was the first to find him.

"Heavens! the man is dead!" exclaimed the sport from Golden Gulch. "A cannon-ball must have come down the rope."

"Not a cannon-ball, but a man," said a voice, at which Sloper started. "Ah! here you are! Who are you, sir?"

"Colonel Jove Sloper of Golden Gulch. Who are you?"

"Captain Coldgrip."

The colonel gave vent to a quick expression of astonishment.

"Jehosaphat! we warn't looking for you exactly, captain."

"We?"

"Gold Chick and me."

"Where is Gold Chick?"

"At my feet—dead. You fell on him."

"Ah! that was what I struck, was it?"

"Gold Chick himself."

The detective stooped and felt the body lying on the ground; then he struck a match and held it over the sport's face.

"Not so bad as it might have been," he said, with a glance at Sloper.

"Isn't he dead?"

"No, only unconscious."

"By Jove! I'm glad of that. But—hark! as I live, somebody is in the shaft again. I hear feet along the walls."

Captain Coldgrip went back to the shaft.

The Shastan had not guessed amiss.

There was a rope in the shaft and somebody was coming down. Was it the man who had severed the cord for him?

"I can guess who did that deviltry," said the city sleuth to himself as he waited in the shaft which had almost proved his tomb. "If he comes down here to see the result of his work, I will show him an unexpected hand. There is many a slip in a game, Injun Nick, and this one has been in my favor."

The detective could tell that the person descending the rope was doing so with the greatest caution, and he waited on the floor of the shaft as Gold Chick had waited for him (the captain) a few moments before.

Hand over hand the unseen person came down the rope.

Colonel Sloper, near the detective, was awaiting developments with bated breath.

"I guess the captain tumbled to his death," said a voice a few feet above his head. "I don't hear a thing. It is stiller than a dozen graveyards down here and darker than canned-up Egypt. I wonder if I am expected to hunt around here till I find the detective. I suppose

"I am. Great Scot! why didn't I push the red demon into the shaft when I had a chance? I always think too late."

"That man is not Injun Nick," muttered the detective. "Can it be his chief of torture, Nugget Nox? I will know in another minute; the fellow is almost here."

Captain Coldgrip hugged the wall of the shaft and continued to wait for his prey.

"Here I am, on solid ground with a whole body," said the voice he had just heard. "It's a wonder the Injun didn't serve me the same trick he served the captain."

The New York detective leaned forward and his hand executed a quick movement.

"O—oh!—heavens!" gasped a man as the cold hand of the cool captain closed on a human throat.

"Silence! I'm not the dead man your master thinks me," whispered Coldgrip sternly. "I'm still able to play a little hand in this bonanza game. You are not Injun Nick. Are you—"

"I am Dolores," said the captured person.

"Injun Nick pressed me into service and sent me down here to see what had become of you. You must be made of rubber not to be killed by the tumble you had. Is there any blood in the hand you've got at my windpipe?"

"Not an over supply, Dolores," laughed the detective. "Are you anxious to go up and report to the scarlet Satan waiting for you at the top of the shaft?"

Dolores drew back the length of Captain Coldgrip's arm.

"I'd rather not," he said. "The red might take a notion to draw his bowie across the rope."

"Then I'll go up myself," said Coldgrip coolly.

Captain Dolores uttered an exclamation of horror.

"He'll cut the rope on you again," he said.

"I'll take that risk. He will think I am Dolores coming back with my report, don't you see? Besides the rope is fastened where I had fixed mine, is it not?"

"It is."

"Very well. I want to finish it with this Indian first. You will stay here while I work the play, captain. You will have excellent company."

"Company? Who are here?"

"Your old pard Gold Chick and a new acquaintance, Colonel Sloper."

"The—Old Harry!" cried Dolores. "So I have found Gold Chick at last. You are actually going up the rope to Injun Nick captain?"

"I am. Give me your hat. Ah! I can crush it over my eyes—thus! and in the light of the red-skin's wax candle I will look like Dolores Dash till I am ready to act."

Dolores did not remonstrate when his hat was transferred to the detective's head, and a moment later he knew that the New York sleuth was going up the rope by means of the side walls to his mortal enemy.

"My old friend Dolores, eh?" said a voice as a hand touched him. "I thought we had parted forever, but we meet again in the Spanish bonanza."

"What?" cried the gold sport. "Is this the goal?"

"This is the Padre's Palace, and I am Jove Sloper."

"Jehu! Where is Gold Chick?"

"Strike a match!"

Dolores was not slow to comply, and he soon had the pleasure of gazing into the open eyes of the pard he had hunted with such assiduity.

Meantime Captain Coldgrip was moving up the rope, nearing the top by degrees.

The little candle that burned like a star above him would soon show him the well-known form and blazing eyes of Injun Nick.

He had crushed Dolores's hat over his forehead, and hoped by such means to deceive the red-skin until he could reach the top of the shaft.

It was a play rendered doubly hazardous by the Indian's keen perception, and the detective felt that he was playing the coolest game of his life.

Should Injun Nick discover the true character of the man coming up to him, the rope would be cut in the twinkling of an eye, and the career of Captain Coldgrip would terminate in the most thrilling manner!

Success lay in hoodwinking the sleepless red-skin waiting at the top of the shaft for the messenger he had sent down to report on the work his knife had done.

Captain Coldgrip glanced up occasionally to see the little candle in the hand of the Indian.

He shut his lips hard and bided his time.

"This is one of the big plays for the Spanish bonanza," he muttered. "If I fail, Colonel Cantwell will never hear from his detective, and Estelle will watch in vain for her friend. But I am not going to fail. I intend to hoodwink the red demon above me, and show him that cutting ropes does not always prove fatal!"

Waiting eagerly for the man he knew was coming up from below, Injun Nick leaned over the edge of the shaft with a gleam of triumph in his midnight eyes.

His little candle could not show him the outlines of the person's figure, and he would have to

wait until the climber had reached the very top of the pit.

"The trail is at an end!" he ejaculated. "Injun Nick holds the key to the Spanish bonanza! He will be the red nabob of the wide Southwest, and mebbe the Flower of San Tonquin will be a gold-queen in his realm! The sleuth from the East is dead! Ha! dead—dead—dead!"

Captain Coldgrip heard the last sentence, which the Scarlet Hercules could not keep back.

His hands were almost at the top of the shaft, and the waxen candle was showing him the victorious features of the demon in red.

"Here you are, sure enough?" exclaimed Injun Nick, drawing back to let his supposed messenger scramble out of the shaft. "Well, what did you find at the bottom?"

The next moment Captain Coldgrip's hand caught the floor, and the next he drew himself out with an agility that disconcerted the Indian.

"What did I find, eh?—Injun Nick?" he cried, and then he went like a springing tiger straight at the man whose eyes were already fixed on him with a wild stare!

It was a coup totally unexpected by the most wily of plotters.

Injun Nick attempted to receive the attack, but its swiftness, its thunderbolt-like character overcame him!

"I've had ropes cut on me before!" laughed the detective as he forced the Indian against the wall of the little alcove, and held him there with the bloodless hand at his throat. "The next time don't send a messenger to inspect the battleground, but go yourself."

Injun Nick glared at his antagonist and ground his teeth.

The tiger was fairly caught, and the strength of Captain Coldgrip was sufficient to hold him in thrall.

"We are both at the door of the Spanish bonanza!" the detective went on. "The Palace of the Padre is beneath us, and Father 'Selmo's secret is out at last. You waited a minute too long before cutting the rope on me, Injun Nick. What do you think of the Coldgrip game by this time?"

There was no answer, save by the eyes that spoke eternal hatred and cherished vengeance.

"They want you at the Red Lizard," the detective continued. "They want you there for the killing of Major Miguel, and the slaughter you made when you rescued Nugget Nox. What do you say to going to the hotel? It is only a little ways, Injun Nick. Let us go and see how your last battle-field looks."

Captain Coldgrip drew a revolver and clapped it against the throbbing temple of his old-time foe.

"It gives you a chance, don't you see?" he said. "We will go to the Red Lizard."

The Indian had not yet spoken, and even then he said nothing.

The detective took him down the narrow aisle of the little church and out upon the street.

Once the red-skin's eyes flashed anew there, but the revolver was thrust into his face and a voice behind it said:

"As you please, Injun Nick. You can die here, or face the pards of San Tonquin at the Red Lizard."

Several minutes later, the lamp burning on the porch of the famous hotel revealed a sight that made a dozen men start and utter exclamations of rage.

"Gentlemen, this is the man you want!" said Captain Coldgrip, halting before them. "This is the demon who bloodied your boards a few hours ago."

And he pushed the red Hercules forward, to see a dozen hands hold him fast.

CHAPTER XXV.

DOOMED TO DIE.

INJUN NICK, thus thrown into the power of the men who thirsted for his blood, drew his magnificent figure up and looked the crowd boldly in the eye.

Captain Coldgrip had stepped back like a man who has done his work. He saw the scarlet Hercules gripped by a dozen bronzed hands, and as many revolvers were looking him in the face.

"Hold a session right away!" said some one. "Judge Lynch is always on the bench."

These words were taken up and repeated with shouts of approval.

"The blood shed by this Injun is hardly dry!" a six-foot tough said. "He came hyer and shot right and left indiscriminately; he killed Major Miguel in cold blood. What's your charge ag'in' him, captain?"

The question was addressed to the detective who was in the act of turning away, going back to the mouth of the El Dorado.

"I have none to make, gentlemen. You seemed to want Injun Nick. He is in your hands. In this part of Uncle Sam's domains it is blood for blood, I believe."

"Blood for blood, bet yer sweet life, cap'n!" and the crowd forgot the detective in its burning eagerness to deal with the Indian.

In a little while the prisoner stood in the bar-room, surrounded by the San Tonquin pards. The six-foot individual just mentioned was

made judge of the lawless tribunal, and the trial proceeded.

Captain Coldgrip had turned away, and was walking down the street.

He had left the rope hanging down the shaft, and was now going back to it.

The prisoners of the mine—Dolores, Gold Chick and Colonel Sloper—were doubtless where he had left them. He had no desire to witness the impending doom of Injun Nick.

He had hardly left the plaza when a man appeared upon it and advanced cautiously upon the hotel.

"They've got something in hand," the person muttered. "Mebbe they've caught Injun Nick. If this is the case, it's my duty to do something for him. What did he do for me? Jehu! it chills my blood now when I think of it."

Does the reader recognize the man now? Nugget Nox.

Injun Nick's chief of torture had come back to San Tonquin for a little game of his own, and in time to find his master in the closest place of his life.

He reached the porch of the Red Lizard and leaned against one of the wooden pillars, keeping it between him and the lamp.

"By the great spoon! they've got our red Satan himself!" he ejaculated. "What shall I do?—go down to whar I left ther boys or play a red hand myself as he played for me? I don't know as I'm equal to the emergency, but something's got ter be done and that almighty quick. San Tonquin won't stand on ceremony, and this death court won't take bail."

Nugget Nox heard the trial proceeding beyond the bar-room door.

Now and then, as somebody stirred, he caught sight of the man with the black eyes and dark Indian-fied face.

"They don't frighten the eagle with all their palaver," muttered Nugget Nox. "If I war sure they'd give Indian Nick an hour, I'd have all the band hyer and then—by Jericho! San Tonquin would know how we value our captain. An hour! they won't give him ten minutes after the farce they're playin' in thar! But they must not have Injun Nick's life. By Jupiter! they shall not!"

But what could the speaker do single-handed?

Injun Nick was in the hands of infuriated San Tonquin.

Nugget Nox drew back undecided, but with a fierce look toward the hotel.

One of his hands held a revolver which he kept half-drawn, and the other rested within easy reach of a seven-inch bowie.

He was the only man on the porch, the crowd had crowded into the little bar-room, and the trial was almost at an end.

All at once Nugget Nox heard a footstep on the plaza, and the next moment he saw a man at his elbow.

"Captain Coldgrip's pard!" muttered Nox.

"I can't make a pard out of this man. He wants Injun Nick's blood as bad as San Tonquin does; and for that matter he wants mine, too."

Nugget Nox could not help eying the man who had halted near him.

Did he know that he was the man whom Injun Nick once sent bound to the vultures of the parched llano? Was he aware that Jack Javert, the gold-hunter, and San Diego Dolph were the same person?

Why should Dolph help Injun Nick in his hour of need?

Surely Nugget Nox has not the cheek to ask him to lend a hand!

For a minute the two men stood at the porch eyeing one another, then San Diego Dolph leaned toward Nox.

"Ah! it is you, is it?" he said. "What is going on in thar?"

"They've got Injun Nick," was the reply.

Dolph started.

"Is the red Hercules alive and in the hands of San Tonquin?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"How did they catch him?"

"I don't know; he was in thar when I came up."

"Are you going to try to rescue him?"

San Diego Dolph eyed Nugget Nox closely while he spoke.

The Indian's chief of torture smiled.

"What kin I do?" he asked.

"What did he do for you on this very porch?" was the quick response.

"I know, but—"

"Ah! you're not Injun Nick! I know that!" laughed Dolph. "You owe your red pard a big play. Why don't you make it, Nugget Nox?"

There was no answer, but Nox felt the rebuke and threw a mad look toward the hotel.

"I could go in thar and shoot right an' left—thet's a solid fact; but what would that amount ter?" he said at last. "I can't shoot and pull a man away from a lot of tigers like the Injun did. He's worth ten men like me when it comes ter work of that kind."

"Then you're going to let San Tonquin finish Injun Nick."

"I wouldn't if I had a pard," said Nugget Nox shrewdly.

"Do you throw that out for me?"
The eyes of the two men met at that moment.
"I'll make it mean you," Injun Nick's lieutenant said, and he laid his hand on Dolph's shoulder. "Will you help me? Even if the Injun isn't your friend, do you want to see a lot of tigers chaw him to pieces? I believe in giving a man chance."

"You do, eh?" ejaculated San Diego Dolph. "By Jove! I'm glad to hear you say this, Nugget Nox. You believed in giving Jack Javert a chance when he was sent to the sun and the vultures! you were of the same opinion when you planned out Captain Coldgrip's fiery grave on the mesa. A chance eh? Oh, yes! the world is full of liberal minded-cusses like you!"

Nugget Nox drew back with a pair of flashing eyes and his fingers tightened round the butt of his revolver, but San Diego Dolph followed him up and continued in the same caustic whisper:

"My justice-loving friend, you've got a heart running over with gall! I am to help the red devil who bound me to a horse and sent me across the llano to be picked to death by a thousand vultures. And why? Because, as Jack Javert, I was one of the bonanza fools and consequently interfered with Injun Nick's game! After that he sent a dead man into San Tonquin with a letter in his hands saying that I had murdered him. Certainly I'll help rescue a man of this stripe. I'll wade into the crowd yonder and shoot Injun Nick loose! Don't you think I ought to, Nugget Nox?"

Before the Indian's pard could reply a loud voice in the bar-room said:

"What shall the sentence be, men of San Tonquin?"

"Thar!" said Dolph. "The trial is over. Sentence now."

The answer to the question uttered beyond the porch was not long delayed. It seemed to come from the lips of fifty men who spoke at once.

"Death!"
"Death it is, gentlemen!" said the judge of the lynch court. "This man is to die by the law which takes blood for blood!"

"Look yonder!" suddenly cried Nugget Nox, pointing forward. "What fetches the Flower of San Tonquin hyer?"

San Diego Dolph turned half-way round and saw the faultless figure of Gerta at the porch a few feet away.

The girl had just come.

"She must have heard of this," said Dolph.

"But she won't interfere."

"Will you?"

Nugget Nox saw a gleam light up the eyes of the bonanza sport.

"As San Diego Dolph no; as Jack Javert the vulture-scarred victim yes!" was the reply, spoken between teeth.

"Then you've got to do it quickly," said the red-skin's pard. "The girl is on the porch. What is that she carries in her hands? A drop-per, by all that's holy!"

Gerta had stepped upon the porch and her eyes were fastened on the door and the crowd beyond.

"You can stay or go just as you choose," said Dolph to Nugget Nox. "I am going to interfere in this game. As San Diego Dolph I might listen to Captain Coldgrip if he war here; but I am Jack Javert again!"

"You are goin' to shoot Injun Nick," cried Nox, clutching the bonanza sport's arm.

Dolph looked at him with tigerish eyes and jerked loose.

"I am going to play a game of my own!" he said. "The girl is at the door. Thar's no telling what she intends to do. I must get ahead of her play. After months Jack Javert has a chance to get even for the llano game! Don't fool with me, Nugget Nox. I owe you a debt wh ch I might pay here and now!"

The next moment San Diego Dolph was on the porch, and Gerta, who was about to force her way into the little bar-room where the men of San Tonquin were voting on the manner of Injun Nick's death, felt fingers encircle her arm.

"Hang me if you shall cheat me out of a chance to help the red captain, Jack Javert!" hissed Nox. "If it's ter be my last play, I'll make it now."

He whipped out a revolver and threw up his bronze right hand.

"A bullet through Jack Javert's head begins the battle!" he continued.

The finger at the trigger was merciless, but all at once something dark swooped upon the wrist behind it, and Nugget Nox recoiled to look into the gleaming eyeballs of a young Indian!

"Wizard Dick holds the white-skin!" said the red. "He no shoot Jack while the Apache holds his wrist."

The baffled tough threw a glance toward the door of the Red Lizard.

San Diego Dolph had disappeared, but Gerta irresolute and astonished, stood at the threshold with the lamp-light on her colorless face.

He had not seen the bonanza sport push the girl aside, nor heard him whisper at her ear these words:

"Let me play my hand first, Gerta. After

that you can show yours. The stake is Injun Nick, and I guess I have the best right to it of any man living. He sent me to the vultures once; I want to send him elsewhar!"

He dropped her arm and pushed his stalwart figure inside.

The girl too amazed to answer, could only look and remain speechless at the door.

San Diego Dolph was seen before he had taken a step into the Red Lizard. The members of the nocturnal court knew that he did not belong to the town.

"Whar's the prisoner?" he said, in reply to the suspicious looks he got, and then he pushed his way by main force through the crowd to the little space where Injun Nick faced the avengers of blood.

"Don't let that man show any hand!" called out several voices. "He is the fellow we tried for killin' the youngster who came in with the paper in his dead fingers!"

"Yes, I'm that man!" said San Diego Dolph, halting in the circle and close to Injun Nick whose eyes had taken on a look of astonishment. "I am called San Diego Dolph in some places, but the prisoner thar once dealt with me as Jack Javert! I have a hand to play, gentlemen of San Tonquin. A man who has been tied to a horse and sent helpless to the vultures of the llano ought to get even with the man who tortured him. What do you say, gents?"

The bronze judge of the court stepped forward.

"Who served you a trick like this?" he asked.

"This red Satan here! Injun Nick!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A THUNDERSTRUCK APACHE.

"Is this true?"

The six-foot judge of the San Tonquin court had turned upon the resolute Indian, and was looking him through.

"If he does not know me, let me prove my identity," said San Diego Dolph. "I carry the souvenirs of that accursed ride on my breast. Gentlemen of San Tonquin, Injun Nick and all, behold the vultures' mark!"

He had opened his shirt by a quick, mad jerk, and the crowd that leaned forward saw the blended scars of beak and talon.

Several exclamations of anger greeted the sight, and Dolph laughed sarcastically as he looked at the pards.

"I hope none of you gents will ever go through an experience like mine!" he said. "Aha! the Injun knows me now. I have an idea that he knew me all along. Eh, Injun Nick?"

"I know you," came over the red-skin's lips.

"I also know who cheated the air-wolves of the llano. It wasn't my fault, Jack Javert."

"Don't I know that?" cried the bonanza sport grating his teeth. "Your fault? Well, I should say not!"

"Do you want that man?" broke in the big judge. "We want to know if you claim Injun Nick under the unwritten statutes of blood for blood."

"I claim him!" said San Diego Dolph firmly.

"You know what he did here?"

"I know it all."

"The blood of Major Miguel is on his hands."

"Yes."

"So is the blood of the six men he shot when he rescued his right bower."

"I know that."

"Your claim is ahead of ours. We admit that."

"Still, you don't like to surrender him?" asked Dolph with a smile.

"It's a little ag'in' the grain to do that, Captain Dolph, but we respect prior claims. It's no more than right. Take your man."

The crowd though eying the Indian like a pack of tigers made no outspoken remonstrance. It was evident that they did not like to see him transferred from their hands into those of the bonanza sport, or, in other words, from the power of twenty men into that of one.

The Indian showed no signs of joy at the proposed change. If he rejoiced over it his eye exhibited no satisfaction, but from behind the sweeping lashes of black it looked calmly at San Diego Dolph.

"Do you want him tied?" asked the San Tonquin judge. "Or, are we to witness the revenge for the vultures' work?"

"You can see the beginning of it," was the reply. "I want Injun Nick's hands fastened to his sides," and Dolph added under his breath.

"By Jupiter! I'm going to take no chances with this red rattlesnake."

In an instant, as it seemed, a rope was produced and three stout hand slashed the red-skin's arms to his sides.

"Thar he is, San Diego," was the next sentence, and the bonanza sport his eyes gleaming with vengeance leaned quickly forward and caught Injun Nick's arm.

"Come!" he said looking into his enemy's face. "This is my game. It's only the reversal of things, Injun Nick. If fortune plays for you ag'in, you won't find Jack Javert growling over it."

"Go on," said the Indian haughtily. "I am not growling now."

The crowd opened a path to the porch and Jack and his enemy passed out.

As the bonanza sport crossed the threshold he thought of the girl Gerta and looked for her; but she had disappeared.

"She saw I meant business and went back," he said to himself. "She came here to help the Injun, but why should she? He would not have scrupled at strangling her friend, the little padre. I don't see why she should want to succor this Southwest devil."

The crowd followed the two men upon the plaza.

San Diego Dolph did not lose sight of Injun Nick for a single moment.

He thought of Nugget Nox whom he had left near the veranda but he did not even look about for him as if he knew that his Apache pard Wizard Nick had closed in upon the Indian's chief of torture.

Across the plaza to the lynchers' tree and beyond!

The curious crowd of bronzed men was still at Dolph's heels.

"Halt!" said the bonanza sport at last, and every man stopped.

San Diego Dolph looked down the trail that wound toward Santa Fe through the starlight, and sounded a peculiar whistle.

The next moment several figures came in sight, and half a dozen men gave utterance to exclamations of surprise.

An Indian and three horses had appeared.

If there was anything calculated to fire San Tonquin blood at that time it was the sight of an Apache.

The sport-pards had not forgotten the terrible work of one of the mine Indians under a certain tree on the plaza, and now here was a member of the hated tribe, and perhaps the very one who had decimated the lynching crowd!

"You expected to win by your play, I see," said the big judge, glancing from the Indian and the steeds to San Diego Dolph.

The sport smiled faintly and his eyes twinkled.

In less than five minutes from the Indian's appearance Injun Nick was seated on one of the horses and strong cords were lashing his legs to the animal's sides.

"Ain't you goin' to take vengeance hyar?" exclaimed several disappointed men.

"Why should I?" smiled Dolph. "I wasn't struck in San Tonquin."

There was no further remonstrance, and when the Indian had been fastened securely to the horse Dolph and Wizard vaulted into the other saddles.

"Mebbe we'll see you later, gents," said Dolph to the crowd that looked on in silence and no very good humor. "If we never meet ag'in, you kin remember Jack Javert by his vulture-torn breast. Good-night, my dark-brown cherubs. This is one of the side plays of the Spanish bonanza game!"

The next moment the three horses started forward at once and the San Tonquin pards saw Injun Nick and his enemies disappear almost before they could realize that they had really been robbed of a victim.

"By heavens! that's what I call a cool game played on a pack of fools!" suddenly exclaimed one.

"What do you mean?" cried the big judge.

"We've been hoodwinked—duped, lied out of our prisoner! Jack Javert belongs to Injun Nick's gang. A thousand to ten on it, anyhow!"

A short silence followed the assertion and then the same belief seemed to dawn on the crowd.

Twenty men were swearing with all their might the next minute.

The only cool one in the whole lot seemed to be the self-appointed judge.

"I'll risk Jack Javert in this play," he said at last. "If he has fooled San Tonquin I'll agree to treat the whole lay-out for the next six months. I don't consider myself fooled one bit. Jack Javert wanted Injun Nick for vengeance. He has the first claim on him and we war in honor bound to give him up. Let them go. We will wait for the report. It will come some time."

At that time San Diego Dolph and his red foe were already some distance from San Tonquin.

Injun Nick rode between the two men and was closely watched by both.

The trail which was almost a road was wide and easily kept.

Injun Nick, who had not spoken since leaving the bonanza town, gripped the reins and looked ahead.

"Injun Nick, how far is it to the llano?" suddenly asked Dolph, leaning slightly toward the red.

"I don't know," was the answer, and then the Indian looked at his captor.

"Are we going there?" he asked.

"Mebbe so."

"It is across the border—in Texas."

A slight nod from Dolph told the red-skin that he was listening.

"How nigh war you to the Spanish bonanza?" asked Dolph.

Injun Nick's eyes instantly flashed.

"Nigher than you'll ever get," he said, giving the sport look for look.

"The captain spoiled it all, did he?"
 "To Tartarus with Captain Coldgrip!" grated Injun Nick.

"You don't like him, I see," was the reply.
 There was no answer, and for several miles the three kept on in silence.

It was a strange ride over the trail which led through comparatively open country. The Indian lashed to the saddle showed only by his bonds that he was a prisoner, and despite the cords which were tight and strong he was watched with eagle vigilance by the men between whom he rode.

All at once the young Apache looked back and listened.

San Diego Dolph caught the rapid movement.
 "Are we followed?" he asked.

Wizard Dick answered by a look.

"What become of the man I left in front of the Red Lizard?"

"I choked him."

"Not enough, probably. Your hand is not Captain Coldgrip's, remember!"

Wizard Dick's eyes flashed resentfully.

He had choked Nugget Nox well, and he did not like to have his work underrated, not even by the man whose pard he was.

"Go on," he said to Dolph. "Wizard Dick will go back!"

"To San Tonquin?"

"To the person on the trail."

San Diego Dolph leaned toward Injun Nick's horse and suddenly grasped the bridle-rein.

"You understand the situation, I see," he said, looking up into the Indian's face. "The chances are that we are followed."

Injun Nick made no answer more than a slight nod. He was listening with all ears for a repetition of the sound Wizard Dick had caught.

The Apache had turned back with resolution in his coal-black eyes. His face had been set toward San Tonquin.

San Diego Dolph and Injun Nick were riding rapidly over the starlight trail, and the brisk nocturnal breeze was chasing them.

The Apache buck rode back with his long hair whipping the wind, and all his senses on the alert.

The question with him was: Who was on the track?

He did not go far before he halted, drew rein alongside of the trail and waited.

Horse and man became one statue in the night.

"I hear him!" said the Indian's lips, moving faintly. "The dog that runs on the scent will never find the game!"

His eyes were watching over the trail just traveled; he heard the approaching unknown, but could not see him.

On, on came the horse in pursuit, and each step seemed to brighten the eager glow in the Apache's eyes.

Suddenly the pursuer was seen, and then the waiting Indian moved.

All the time he had been holding a naked knife along his bare right arm, waiting and watching for the time when he should use it.

All at once the blade went upward, the Indian darted toward the person who had come up, and then down came the knife!

It was the work of a second—a stroke in a flash as it were.

A wild cry followed the blow, and a figure reeled from the pursuer's saddle.

Wizard Dick drew back with changed countenance and looked from his bloody knife to the figure that had fallen across the trail.

He was a picture of horror; he seemed glued to the saddle by some sudden terror.

All at once he threw the knife away with a startling cry in Apache.

The next moment he was on the ground and bending over the person he had struck.

A groan was heard when he touched the body. It only drew the Indian's face closer to it.

Then he saw the features of his victim and after one look he sprang up and started toward his horse.

"Wizard Dick ought to die for the blow he struck!" he exclaimed. "He has killed the Flower of San Tonquin!"

He looked over his shoulder with a shudder. Gerta was lying at his feet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NOT BIG ENOUGH FOR THREE.

"INJUN NICK is safe in the clutches of the pards of San Tonquin and they will make quick work of him. The rascally red has played his part of the bonanza game to the end. San Tonquin will avenge the tortures of the Grande Mesa and I can now go back to the rope in the golden shaft."

Captain Coldgrip, the New York detective, talked thus as he walked from the Red Lizard where he had just delivered Injun Nick into the hands of the San Tonquin sport.

The Indian had failed at the very mouth of the Spanish Mine, and instead of exploring its wonderful depths he had fallen into the power of a lot of men who were not likely to spare.

The little church met the detective with ominous silence. He found his way to the alcove

behind the altar and felt the rope still in the shaft.

There was something romantic in the fact that the little structure had covered the entrance to the lost mine for a great many years, and that Padre 'Selmo, dead now, had guarded the secret with so much zeal.

Captain Coldgrip could now understand why the padre had stuck to San Tonquin. He had no hopes of making converts of the rough men who inhabited the place; they never came to his little church, but for all this, there was not one who was not willing to die for the Mummy.

"I begin to see why 'Selmo swore me to make Gerta my wife," said the detective. "He intended to leave his secret as a legacy to her and he would pit me against Gold Chick, whom he knew was in the mine. Now that the padre is dead, what shall I do?—respect the oath? The girl herself shall decide!"

The detective leaned over the shaft and looked down.

All was dark below.

What had become of Captain Dolores, and where was Gold Chick and Colonel Sloper?

"I'm going down to see," said Coldgrip; "the real battle for the Spanish bonanza is yet to take place for aught I know. I am here to fight it out, if it has not yet been fought," and the next moment he noiselessly swung himself over the brink of the shaft.

He was now going down to unknown adventures.

A short time before he had climbed up to a bitter foe, now he was descending, hand over hand, to three men who might have leagued against him.

Captain Coldgrip took no light with him down the shaft; he preferred to descend in darkness, and meet in gloom the adventures fate might have in store for him.

He had not come from New York to shrink from a danger like this.

The rope which swayed from side to side in the darkness told that a man was on it. The detective went down rapidly, and without noise.

After awhile he touched solid ground, and stepped away from the cord.

He was in the heart of the lost mine; the thought sent a thrill to his heart.

Where were Dolores, Sloper and Gold Chick that they had not heard nor waited for him?

He started down the corridor, which he soon found, listening for sounds, and armed for attack.

Captain Coldgrip was underneath San Tonquin, and in the long-sought corridors of the Spanish bonanza.

His thoughts went back to Estelle in New York.

"I'll make her richer than the heirs of the Vanderbilts!" he mentally exclaimed. "I'll enrich Colonel Cantwell, too, and San Diego Dolph, Gerta and the rest. I'd like to see the interior of this bonanza. This pure air comes from some undiscovered outlet. Now, where are the men I left here to-night?"

More than once Captain Coldgrip stopped and listened, but not a sound came to his ears.

He began to be puzzled by the strange silence.

All at once, however, he stopped for the twentieth time.

"It's bigger than a dozen Ophirs!" exclaimed a coarse voice, followed by a laugh.

"I should remark it war," was the reply. "Now, if we kin corral the girl before she finds the real Jack Brown, of Brown's Valley, we'll be in golden clover for a fact."

Oh, she's not hard ter find, Goldy. She is up in San Tonquin. Shall I go up?"

"I will go myself. Besides, I want to meet this New York sleuth."

"Captain Coldgrip. He must have euchered Injun Nick at the top of the shaft. Think of it, Goldy. The Spanish bonanza belongs to two. What ar' you goin' to be?—a Wall street prince or a Frisco nabob?"

"The gold sultan of the Southwest! I'll have enough to play that role, won't I, Dolores?"

A laugh came before the reply.

"Jehosaphat! I should say so," was the answer. "I've picked out my future."

"Ah! what is that, Dolores?"

"I'm goin' to bust Monte Carlo."

"That's across the ocean."

"Somewhar thar! I don't know just whar, but I'll find it, Goldy. I'll shine out a gold count in Europe, and when I once get my hand in, I'll break the biggest monte banks they've got thar. This mine is exhaustless. You've showed me enough to-night to buy Broadway. Ain't this worth playin' for? We got thar at last, Goldy!"

Captain Coldgrip heard the two men, with a fixed smile at his handsome lips.

Although the conversation had been carried on in darkness, he could readily locate them by the sound of their voices.

"The bonanza is already divided, I see," he murmured. "These two golden jackals are counting their chicks before the shells are fairly broken. It remains to be seen whether the Southwest gets a new nabob, and Monte Carlo a master. There were three men here when I left. What has become of Colonel Sloper?"

"Push on to the rope now, Dolores," said Gold Chick's voice again. "Thar's no telling what has happened overhead since Captain Coldgrip went up to meet the Indian."

Certain sounds told the detective that the two men were moving toward him.

He drew back and hugged the wall of the rather wide chamber which he occupied.

A bowie lay along his sleeve, and woe to the sport who roused the cool tiger almost breathless in the dark.

"Let Gold Chick go on his mission," the sleuth said. "With only Dolores down here, I will play a certain game."

Nearer and nearer the two men came.

The New Yorker moved not; he only hugged the rough wall and waited for them to pass.

They went by without touching him, but so near that the bloodless hand could have reached Gold Chick's throat with but little effort on its owner's part.

"Hello! Hyer's the rope all sound!" exclaimed a voice several minutes later. "You've only to stay hyer till I see how things are working above, Dolores. If a new rope should be placed in the shaft and somebody comes down without the signal we've agreed upon, you know your duty. There must be no fool plays now. The Spanish bonanza is within our grasp. If we lose it we deserve to be noosed, and hung up for the vultures."

"Trust me in a game like this, Goldy! By heavens! the person who comes down the shaft without the signal will never touch the yellow stake for which he plays! Captain Dolores has wielded a knife in the dark before this."

Captain Coldgrip saw a match flash up in the darkness. For a moment it revealed the figures of two men, and one of them suddenly caught a rope that dangled overhead and raised himself from the ground.

It was Gold Chick embarking on the mission.

Dolores leaned against the side of the shaft and held the match in his hand till it went out and no longer showed him the man working his way up the shaft by means of the rope and the walls.

The detective watched Dolores as a tiger watches his prey. Twenty feet did not separate them and the Santa Fe Thunderbolt did not dream that Claude Coldgrip at that moment had his eyes upon him.

"I'll go back now and see whether I can bear anything of the colonel," ejaculated Dolores in audible tones as his match went out and left him in darkness. "I need not be afraid to tap a candle now, for I'm alone hyer—alone in the big bonanza! Jehu! it makes me feel richer than Cressus!"

Another match was struck and then a little wax candle, a relic of Father 'Selmo was lighted.

Captain Coldgrip saw the flame enlarge above Dolores's hand, and watched him come toward him.

"Now, my Santa Fe lizard, I'll give you a genuine surprise," he said eying Dolores closely. "Gold Chick has left you to me for a change. I'll give you excitement enough."

Down the wall came the sport with the candle.

The New York detective could see his little black eyes snap.

All at once Captain Coldgrip stepped out from the wall.

"Hello, Dolores!" he said with a grin.

The Santa Fe sport stopped as if a pistol had been thrust into his face.

"It's only me, Dolores—your old acquaintance Captain Coldgrip," continued the detective as his bloodless hand darting forward like a serpent closed on the man's wrist.

"I'd sooner see the Prince of Darkness!" cried Dolores. "When did you come back?"

"In time to have kept Gold Chick here if I had wanted to," was the response. "Come, my gold bird! You need not glance at your dropers unless you really want to provoke some work of the kind they do! I'm ready for it if you say so, Dolores."

But Dolores drew back and shook his head.

"Where is Colonel Sloper?" asked the captain.

The Santa Fe sport looked amazed.

"You need not say you don't know anything about the man, Dolores. You met him when you came down the shaft at Injun Nick's command. You are on your way to the spot where you left the colonel. Did you and Gold Chick find the bonanza too small for three shares?"

Dolores started visibly, and his face lost color.

"No falsehoods to me!" Captain Coldgrip went on. "I am somewhat interested in this Colonel Sloper. I used to hear of him as a gold king of the Shasta country. Come, Dolores, we'll go to him."

"You won't find him if we do," said Dolores.

"Why not?"

"Sloper suddenly disappeared awhile ago. He fell into a fit of some kind while we were exploring the bonanza."

The detective fixed his eyes on Dolores while he spoke.

"Are you certain he fell in, Dolores?" he asked.

"What did I say?" snapped the Santa Fe gold-hunter.

"I understood you," smiled Coldgrip. "We will go to the fatal pit. Ah! come along, Dolores. Gold Chick has gone to take observations in San Tonquin. You and I will do the same here."

A scowl passed over Dolores's brow, and behind his bunchy lashes of black his eyes flashed a moment's defiance. It cooled when the clutch at his wrist grew tighter.

"This gold lizard is looking for a way out of the difficulty," murmured the spotter. "Colon Sloper, unfortunate before, has suffered anew at the hands of these bonanza pards. I'll choke the truth from this one if I can get at it in no other way."

Dolores bit his lips and threw a glare at Captain Coldgrip.

"I'll show you where we saw the colonel last; that is, if I can find the spot," he said.

"You will find it," was the resolute retort.

Dolores moved forward, watched with eye and revolver by the man from Gotham.

The two went from one chamber to another, out of one corridor into what seemed to be an old shaft, thence from it into a room again.

Captain Coldgrip was beginning to wonder at the extent of the Spanish find when Dolores halted.

"Hyer we are," he said, shooting Captain Coldgrip a quick glance which took in the revolver as well as his figure. "We lost Colonel Sloper hyer. He war crawling ahead of us when all at once he disappeared. There's a bottomless pit yonder."

Dolores pointed forward.

The detective picked up a loose stone and tossed it straight ahead.

It made no noise in falling.

"You believe me now?" said Dolores.

Before the detective could answer a voice came to the ears of both.

"May the eternal curse of God blight the prospects of the two fiends who doomed me to a living death!" said the voice.

Captain Dolores with a strange cry recoiled the length of the spotter's arm.

"Just as I thought," said Coldgrip. "The Spanish bonanza wasn't big enough for three!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GOLD CHICK'S TRIGGER.

GOLD CHICK found San Tonquin, to him, a newsy place.

When he left the little church with the rope concealed where he could quickly find it he went straight to the Red Lizard.

"It was the headquarters of San Tonquin."

His entrance caused a slight commotion among the men in the bar-room at the time, for all knew that Gold Chick had been missing several days.

The good-looking tough took in the crowd at a glance and passed into a room at the end of the counter, but not without a significant glance at the barkeeper.

The room which was small and quite dark until a lamp was lit contained a table and two chairs, and the barkeeper soon appeared with a black necked-bottle and a heavy glass.

Gold Chick's first action was to help himself, after which he told the barkeeper to shut the door and take the other chair.

"Now, I want the news," he said.

"What news?"

"To-night's."

"Oh! you want to hear about how the man called Captain Coldgrip threw Injun Nick into the hands of the San Tonquin seraphs and how—"

"Yes, that's what I want!" interrupted the sport eagerly. "Give me the whole lay-out."

The clerk of the Red Lizard complied.

He began at the beginning and told the whole story. Gold Chick proved an attentive listener, and by means of the barkeeper's narrative he was enabled to trace Captain Coldgrip from the top of the gold shaft to the hotel.

"After he saw Injun Nick delivered, what?" he asked.

"He walked off."

Gold Chick started.

"Didn't he come back?" he exclaimed.

"Nobody has seen the gold-hunter since."

Gold Chick was puzzled.

Had Captain Coldgrip gone back to the shaft, and was it possible for him to descend to the bottom without raising an alarm?

"Well, what did they do with Injun Nick?"

"They turned him over to a man who called himself San Diego Dolph."

"After all his wild shooting on the porch?"

"Yes."

"Did Dolph want vengeance?"

"He said he did."

"Some men are fools!" cried Gold Chick.

"This red-skin may escape from San Diego Dolph and come back. If he does, let San Tonquin look out."

"We know that," said the clerk; "but Dolph swore, by all that is holy, that he should not escape."

"Look out for that Injun! He's a fiery caution. Did you see Coldgrip walk away?"

The barkeeper had to smile over the manner in which Gold Chick came back to the detective.

"I saw him go."

"Toward the south?"

"Down street."

Gold Chick was seen to start again.

"Down street is toward the bonanza," he said to himself. "Can it be possible that this gold-sleuth has gone back to the find?"

He dismissed the clerk and went out.

"I don't like the way Injun Nick got off. I would give a good deal to know that San Tonquin made a sieve out of him," he muttered. "I don't want that red wolf fooling around when I've got my fingers on the lost nuggets. If Dolores warn't waiting for me, I would follow San Diego Dolph and not turn back till I knew he had finished the red-skin. I don't like the situation. My next hunt shall be for Gerta. Dolores says she found nothing by going to Santa Fe. If this is true, I can play a hand of my own to-night."

Five minutes later, Gold Chick was knocking at the door of the Flower of San Tonquin.

There was no response.

"She never locks any one out," he said, and the next moment he was beyond the quiet threshold.

Nobody appeared to resent the intrusion, and the match the sport struck showed him a lamp, to which he applied it.

The little front room was empty, and the sport pushed on to the one beyond.

No Gerta was found.

"Run away again, eh?" ejaculated Gold Chick. "Maybe the girl has gone to Santa Fe a second time. She's almighty eager to see the man called Colonel Smilax—got a notion he knows something about her father, Jack Brown, of Brown's Valley. I don't want 'em to meet; by Jupiter! a meeting now would hurt the little game that comes after the big one."

Gold Chick was alone in the room he had last entered.

At his right was a door which he eyed anxiously as if it was liable to open at any moment.

"Why not make certain of her absence?" he suddenly asked himself. "If she ain't in there she is gone and no mistake. I'll settle it now."

He went to the door and lifted the latch softly. He held a lamp in his left hand.

Opening the door the gold sport held the lamp up and looked into the room before him. "Heavens!" he ejaculated nearly dropping the lamp.

Gold Chick had come upon a sight totally unexpected.

In the little room which was half taken up by a bed a man was writing at a small table. He was a person past fifty, with a long gray beard and piercing black eyes.

When he saw the thunderstruck sport his eyes seemed to get a new glitter.

"Come in. I am almost through," he said quietly.

Gold Chick looked like a person riveted to the floor with amazement.

"I've just got in; haven't been here an hour," the stranger went on. "This is *her* house. I knew where to find it before I got here. Tunis told me."

"Tunis?" echoed Gold Chick.

"Yes, the man you sent from San Tonquin, a little while back with a message to Captain Dolores. Ah! don't you recollect, Gold Chick?"

Gold Chick's memory needed no refreshing. He had not forgotten that he had sent such a messenger and such a message.

"You didn't expect to find me here," the man at the table went on. "You know, perhaps, that Gerta went to Santa Fe, that she came back here unsuccessful. She owed her failure to Tunis, your right bower. She did not find Colonel Smilax because Tunis finding Dolores gone when he got to Santa Fe, opened the dispatch and proceeded to carry out its instructions himself. That Tunis is a sly villain."

The speaker laughed slightly at the end of his last sentence. Still Gold Chick said nothing.

"I presume you haven't told Gerta that I am the true Jack Brown of Brown's Valley," the stranger continued. "No; you think it your duty to lie. You are a man who plays two games at once—one for the Spanish bonanza, the other for a wife! Come in here till I am through."

The last words were spoken like a command.

At the same moment the speaker got up and displayed a silver-mounted revolver which clicked as it left his pocket.

"It is Colonel Smilax who talks, Gold Chick," he said. "I am the man whom you don't want Gerta to meet. I need not tell you the rest. Come in, I say."

Gold Chick entered the room with a scowl and sullenly took a chair at the opposite side of the table.

"Let this man give me half a chance and I'll show him that I'm worse than Tunis!" he growled to himself. "I was looking for the devil here rather than him. If Dolores had remained at his post till Tunis reached it this side play would not be going on here now."

When Gold Chick took the chair Colonel Smilax resumed the pen he had laid down a few moments before.

"I have only one sentence to add—a sentence, and my name," he said, glancing through his

gray eyebrows at Gold Chick, and then he wrote rapidly for a minute, signed his name and threw down the pen again.

"Now, we will talk," he resumed, looking across the table. "I have written a good deal what I wanted to tell Gerta. She will come back probably when I am gone. I have told her that Colonel Smilax is Jack Brown, the man who once held a true diagram of the Spanish bonanza. That diagram was stolen from me one night, and at last I know who the thief was and why he took it. I have told Gerta in this paper the true inwardness of your friendship. I told her that she should take her own life sooner than become the wife of Gold Chick, that you were playing for her, that you were trying to keep her ignorant of the fact that I am her father. Do you want me to read the document?"

"It isn't necessary," said the sport, and then he added with a sneer: "Of course the girl will believe all this?"

"She cannot do otherwise. I have finished with an oath," said Brown. "Her stranger guardian, the padre, is dead. The secret of the Spanish bonanza cost him his life; don't you think so, Gold Chick?"

"I don't care if it did!" snapped the gold sport.

"I am going away from San Tonquin," said Brown. "I would like to stay to fold Gerta in my arms when she comes back, but a new trail or rather a very old one takes me off."

Gold Chick's eyes glistened in a manner which could not escape the other's attention. He leaned across the table with a suddenness that made the sport recoil and looked him in the face.

"Yes, I am going back to the trail of the old mine," he said. "The diagram I had on paper years ago I have in my head to-night. I did not bother myself about it till I knew where Gerta was, and the moment I found her out I resolved to solve the secret. You are on the trail—I know it. Captain Coldgrip, Injun Nick and fifty more are there also. The whole Southwest seems to be full of men whose sole ambition is to find the Spanish bonanza. I tell you I have the key—I, Jack Brown of Brown's Valley, or Colonel Smilax—just as you like, Captain Gold Chick! I'll bet you a thousand to an eagle that I can go straight from this house to the door of the lost ophir. What say you now?"

Gold Chick looked into the glittering eyes of Brown and affected to laugh derisively.

"That's yer eagle!" he exclaimed, producing a gold piece and throwing it on the table between the Californian's hands. "I'd give that to see a man who has solved the gold secret."

"Of course you would!" said Brown. "You've spent years on the trail already—you and your pard, Captain Dolores. Where you have failed, I have found! I used to be mad! For a long time after I was robbed of my diagrams I forgot that I was ever Jack Brown, and then I became Colonel Smilax. You know this, Gold Chick. Somehow or other you discovered the relationship that exists between the Flower of San Tonquin and myself. When she becomes your wife, grass will grow on my bowie's edge!"

"This is not to the bet, colonel," said Gold Chick getting bolder. "My eagle is before you. I'll call your thousand put up. Now show me the bonanza."

"Hang you, you think I can't!" exclaimed Brown. "I see the game of bluff looking from your eyes. Tunis played a bluff game in Santa Fe, but it didn't win in the end. I got a new deck and stocked the cards on your man. I then pumped the little devil dry."

"Getting off again!" laughed Gold Chick. "I am going to hold you to your proposition, colonel."

"I am willing. Come!"

Gold Chick sprung up, a singular gleam mingling with the eagerness in his big dark eyes.

"Do you think I've lived years in Santa Fe without knowing what kind of a town San Tonquin was?" Brown laughed, starting toward the door. "The moment I saw a certain part of it, even in the starlight, I saw the gold diagram before my eyes. Say I can't find the Spanish bonanza, eh? You don't know the crazy pard of Brown's Valley!"

The paper intended for Gerta was left spread out on the table with a lamp burning beside it.

Colonel Smilax led Gold Chick to the front door and thence into the street.

"Let me see," he said, "which way is the padre's chapel?"

A thrill shot through Gold Chick like an arrow.

"By heaven! he knows!" he grated. "This is a man who must not realize what he has discovered!"

Then he turned upon the Californian and said:

"Wait a moment."

The next second Gold Chick stepped forward and was fifteen feet away.

Then all at once he wheeled upon Brown and threw up a heavy six-shooter.

The next second there was a loud report, and a man reeled toward the house!

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DEEP GAME.

GOLD CHICK stood erect in the starlight as the smoke of his quick shot cleared away.

There was a look of triumph in his eyes.

"Self-defense!" he suddenly ejaculated. "I see I have to keep possession of the bonanza by force. I think I am equal to the emergency."

A revolver-shot in San Tonquin was no cause for alarm. The Red Lizard was not emptied by the report of the gold sport's firearm, and Gold Chick went forward unmolested, and looked at the gray bearded man who had fallen against Gerta's house.

A moment later he opened the door and dragged Colonel Smilax inside.

"Why not set a trap for the New York sleuth?" he said. "The recent blood-lettings that have occurred in San Tonquin have sent blood up to the boiling point. There will be no more trials nor attempts at any. I will seal the doom of this persistent trailer, who must be somewhere near."

Gold Chick entered the little room where his victim had left his last writing on the table for Gerta.

He glanced over it for a moment, gave utterance to a slight exclamation of pleasure, and thrust the document into an inner pocket.

"This gives me a firm hold on the Flower of San Tonquin," he said. "Colonel Smilax knew what he was writing, but my play has taken his trick."

Then he took one of the chairs at the table and wrote on a piece of white paper three words and a name:

"Vengeance is mine! CAPTAIN COLDGRIP."

After this he brought the body of his victim into the little room, and laid it on the floor half-way under the table.

"That will fool the shrewdest!" he laughed as he surveyed his work. "It will thunderstrike the captain, too. Killed by Captain Coldgrip will be the universal verdict, and the pards of San Tonquin will make short work of him. Now, if San Diego Dolph finishes Injun Nick, Dolores and I will have things our own way, and the bonanza will make nugget nabobs of us. Good-night, colonel. You came to San Tonquin at a bad time for your own good, but just right to help me along."

He turned the lamp entirely down, and left the little room tenanted by the dead.

Nobody had seen the deed; he had played a cool hand all by himself, and he could now go back to the mine.

Gold Chick walked toward the church through the starlight that revealed the silent houses and cabins of the town.

Nobody was on his track.

He reached the church, opened the door noiselessly, and glided up the narrow aisle to the mouth of the shaft.

The rope was where he had left it, and lifting the trap-door in the floor, he dropped three pebbles one after the other down the shaft.

It was Gold Chick's prearranged signal to Dolores.

"That'll keep the captain's bowie from my breast," he said, adjusting the rope, and a minute later the gold-sport was descending the shaft with confidence.

Nothing occurred to mar the descent, and the tough struck the solid ground with a feeling of relief.

But Dolores was not present to greet him.

Gold Chick waited a few moments in the darkness, and then cursed his missing pard. Then he called him softly, his voice sounding strangely in the gloom, but no Dolores answered.

"Mebbe he thinks the bonanza too small for two!" grated the gold-sport. "If he wants it so, thus it shall be. Two small for two, eh, Dolores? By Jove! I've begun to think so myself."

He continued to wait for tidings from his pard but none rewarded him.

"We fixed Colonel Sloper before I went away. It cannot be that Dolores has fallen into the unexplored tomb into which we lowered the cripple from Stanislaus. I told him not to fool about it, but to remain near the main shaft. Dolores?"

Gold Chick's voice came back to him with an echo.

"I'll solve the mystery. Curse him for a fool! I'll make this bonanza, big as it is, just big enough for one!"

The gold-sport struck a match and lit one of the waxen candles that burned so well in the mine.

"I left a man on guard here. Woe to him if he is trying a little hand of his own!" he exclaimed.

The candle lighted Gold Chick down the corridor that led off in the direction of one of the main chambers of the mine.

"Halt!"

Gold Chick drew back and half-raised his pistol.

A human body seemed lying on the floor directly in his way.

The eyes had the glitter of a tiger's orbs, the face was entirely covered with hair.

Gold Chick could not suppress a cry of horror when he leaned forward for a closer inspection.

"Colonel Sloper!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said the man on the floor of the cavern. "I am the man who has felt your claws. You will keep your revolver where it is, Gold Chick. If it is moved an inch, by the breath of my creator, I'll rattle a bullet through your brains! Are you looking for Dolores?"

"What if I am?"

"Then let me inform you that your pard has doubtless played his game out."

Gold Chick started.

"Who rescued you?" asked the gold sport.

"A man you don't want to encounter just now," was the reply.

"Who is he?"

"Captain Coldgrip."

"Heavens! when did he come back?"

"He was here when you left the bonanza expecting to find him up in the town. He let you go and then he nailed Dolores."

"Where is he now?"

The question came to Gold Chick's lips without the least effort.

Yes, where was the bonanza detective?

"He is liable to come back before long," said Colonel Sloper. "He has left the bonanza."

"By the shaft?"

"No. By the merest accident he discovered the padre's second secret door."

"Where is it?"

"Yes, where is it, Gold Chick?" laughed Sloper, his eyes glistening anew behind his cocked revolver. "When you and your pard lowered me over the unknown wall and then cut the rope with the devilishness of cruelty, you thought it was the last of Colonel Jove Sloper. You thought I would fall a hundred feet and be dashed to pieces. The bonanza was not big enough for three. Awhile ago I heard you say it was just right for one! Now don't throw your candle down, captain. It is burning just as I like it and I'm in no humor to be played with by a man like you."

"I did not drop ten feet when the rope was cut. The pit is not deep, but it had no outlet that I could find. A stone thrown by Captain Coldgrip first gave me hope, and then I heard his voice. He had forced Dolores to guide him to the place. Your pard did not intend to betray you, Gold Chick; he never thought the bonanza too small for two. I came up out of that pit more dead than alive. The light showed me Dolores, and I thought only of the brutal treatment received at your hands and his. The light showed me a revolver in Captain Coldgrip's hand. The next moment it was in mine."

"And you shot Dolores?" cried Gold Chick.

"Yes," grated Sloper. "My first thought was vengeance, and before Captain Coldgrip could interfere I dropped Dolores in his tracks! I used to be the pistol prince of the Shasta country, and my eye has not forgotten its cunning. I will never walk erect again, curses on the gold greed of the Mummy of San Tonquin! but a man doesn't have to stand up to hit a human target!"

Gold Chick glared at the man before him, but said nothing.

"Before now Captain Coldgrip has come back to San Tonquin," the maimed sport continued. "I hope he has," cried Gold Chick.

"Why?"

"Never mind! he will find out when he gets there!"

"He assured me he would not be gone long. The time will soon come when I will see the sunlight again."

"Not if I get a chance at you," muttered Gold Chick. "So Captain Coldgrip found a new way out?"

The last sentence was addressed to the colonel.

"A new way, and one which I am now convinced Father Selmo sometimes used. During my six months' imprisonment I was mysteriously fed, and sometimes I was certain that the food had not come down the main shaft. It is all explained now. Captain Coldgrip's discovery makes it all right."

The curiosity that beamed in Gold Chick's eyes seemed to amuse Colonel Sloper.

"You would like to see the new exit, Gold Chick?" he said.

"You're not disposed to show it; I see that."

"Not much!" grinned the colonel.

"Then I'll go back to the shaft and play a new game with the New York sleuth above ground."

"You will, eh? When?"

"Now."

"I guess not, captain," laughed the Californian over the revolver. "You will stick your candle in the crack in the wall at your left and throw your revolvers over your head!"

"What if I refuse?"

"Then I'll send you down the trail trod by Dolores. Come, Gold Chick. I am Colonel Jove Sloper, of Golden Gulch; you appear to forget this. The candle will now be placed in the crack as I desire."

Colonel Sloper's voice had a ring of exasperating coolness; it made Gold Chick grind his teeth.

Two minutes later the wax candle was burn-

ing in a crevice in the wall and its light revealed the somewhat exciting tableau of the corridor.

Then Gold Chick drew his revolvers, one at a time, and threw them behind him to hear them fall amid the darkness unrelieved by the little light.

He was now completely unarmed and at the mercy of the man who had shot Dolores.

What was to happen next?

"Are you going to hold me here till Captain Coldgrip comes back?" asked the gold sport.

"I could not do that; the candle will not last," was the response. "I ought to serve you as I served Dolores, but I want you to fall into the hands of Jack Brown, of Brown's Valley."

A smile appeared at the corners of Gold Chick's mouth as he started.

Jack Brown!

Why, he was the man he had just left dead in Gerta's house, and he had the important documents intended for the girl in his own bosom.

He looked down into Colonel Sloper's face and said nothing. Then he folded his arms and leaned against the wall beside the candle, as if determined to await the next move.

At almost the same moment a horse bearing two persons entered the outskirts of San Tonquin.

The one seated in the saddle was a young Indian, and he held an inanimate and white-faced girl in his arms.

He did not draw rein until he reached Gerta's house. Then he leaped to the ground and opened the door.

A moment later he deposited his beautiful burden on a little settee which he found in the first room by the aid of a match.

"Wizard Dick has brought the White Flower back," said the Indian, moving toward the door with a last glance at the girl, who showed no signs of life. "The medicine-man of San Tonquin shall make her well."

The Indian closed the door softly behind him and ran through the street.

"Jehosaphat!" cried a man who was one of a dozen in the bar-room of the Red Lizard. "Thar's the Injun who went off with Injun Nick and San Diego Dolph! What fetched you back, reddy? Did Injun Nick prove too much for you?"

Wizard Dick walked straight to the crowd.

"Where medicine-man?" he asked.

"Oh, a doctor, eh? Thar's Sawbones Sam!" and the speaker singled out a tall man who looked but little like a professional.

"Come," said the Indian starting toward the door, and when he went out he had the whole crowd at his heels.

He led them all to Gerta's house and into the room where the young girl lay.

He pointed toward her without a word, then turned on his heel, and was off before a hand could detain him!

The pards of San Tonquin were horror-stricken, and more than one started toward the street with clicking revolvers.

Gerta dead! killed by the Apache!

This thought was in the minds of all.

Sawbones Sam, the rough surgeon, soon discovered life in the girl, and ordered that she should be taken to her bedroom.

The following moment some one opened the door leading into it, and the rays of a lamp penetrated the little chamber.

Two bronze men lifted Gerta in their arms and started forward.

"Great Scot! thar's a dead man in hyer!" suddenly cried some one and half of the crowd drew back.

In a moment, however, the toughs of San Tonquin were staring at the body half under the table, and then some one caught up a piece of paper and read aloud from it:

"Vengeance is mine! CAPTAIN COLDGRIP."

"Read that ag'in!" said Sawbones Sam.

It was done.

"You can hang t'e Yankee sleuth when you catch him!" he said to the crowd.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW GOLD CHICK'S SCHEME WORKED.

It did not take the San Tonquin pards long to see that the man half-way under the table was stone dead.

In the excitement of the moment Gerta was forgotten.

The lamp was held close to the face of the corpse and the rough men inspected it one after another.

All shook their heads till a little man's eyes snapped with recognition.

"They call that man Colonel Smilax in Santa Fe," he said.

Here was identity at last!

"Wal, the colonel is dead enough and the man who took vengeance was bold enough to leave his name behind. Captain Coldgrip, hey?—the man who threw Injun Nick into court awhile ago. Ten chances to one that he didn't strike two blows," and the speaker threw a glance toward the girl.

The look started the crowd off again.

"Shoot the bound on sight!"

"Noose him in the plaza!"

"Death to the assassin, Captain Coldgrip!" If Gold Chick had heard these cries, his eyes would have twinkled with entire satisfaction. Thus far his plan was working admirably. San Tonquin was thirsting for the detective's blood.

A hurried search of Colonel Smilax's clothes revealed nothing important; there was nothing to tell the San Tonquinites that he was, in reality, Jack Brown of Brown's valley, and not Smilax the quiet citizen of Santa Fe.

If the last document he had written had remained where he left it, his true identity would have been established, but Gold Chick had carried it off.

All but a few of the crowd left the room. Among the latter was the tall surgeon-tough who proceeded to examine Gerta's wound, a knife cut down through the shoulder toward the heart.

"No infant gave this stroke," said Sawbones Sam. "This Captain Coldgrip is capable of doing it. They say he has a bloodless hand that can drive a bowie through a six inch plank."

If the surgeon held a grudge against the New York spotter he was using it effectively. His words told in the angry looks and deep oaths of the men who heard them.

Gerta came back to consciousness, but not to her real self. She could not tell the parads that Wizard Dick and not Captain Coldgrip had dealt the blow.

Ten minutes after the doctor's report on Gerta's wound a man walked boldly into the bar-room of Red Lizard.

"Great Caesar! the Yankee sleuth himself!" Captain Coldgrip looked at the crowd and then burst into a laugh.

"So Injun Nick got away from you at last!" he exclaimed.

There was no merry response to the observation, but a slight movement was observed at the end of the bar and in a moment the detective was looking into three heavy revolvers.

"Why didn't you stay away, captain? Don't you know that it is you who is wanted by San Tonquin jes' now? You painted things red at Gerta's house, awhile ago."

The gold detective showed his astonishment by his look.

"We don't keer so much over ther man called Colonel Smilax; mebbe that war a special case ov blood for blood, but ther girl—that war ther meanest stroke ov all."

"What do you mean?" demanded the captain. One-half of the crowd laughed derisively.

"Shoot him down!" said a voice. "Thar war ter be no time wasted over this man."

"Take him down ter Gerta's and let him face his crime."

The last suggestion prevailed, fortunately for the cool detective, for he was at the mercy of the enraged parads, and in a few moments he was walking down the street of San Tonquin, guarded by twenty men who carried revolvers and who watched him like hawks.

They led him into the little house with an air of triumph, and the doctor sprung up when he saw Captain Coldgrip before him.

"Found a ready?" ejaculated Sawbones Sam. "Whar did you git the prisoner?"

"He walked inter ther Red Lizard, laughin' about San Diego Dolph's takin' Injun Nick away."

"With what am I charged? I demand to know," said the detective. "I was to be told at Gerta's house; we are here."

Sawbones Sam took the lamp and led the way to an adjoining room.

Opening the door he said to Captain Coldgrip, while his eyes glistened:

"Look in thar!"

The detective stepped forward coolly and looked into the room. A dead man was lying on the floor, and pinned to a lapel of his dark-brown coat was a piece of paper whose written words were seen by the lamp:

"Vengeance is mine! CAPTAIN COLDGRIP!"

"Well, what of this?" asked the detective, turning to the crowd.

"Wait till we show you the rest," said the doctor, opening the door.

It was noticed that he opened this door with unusual caution, and that the crowd at the detective's heels tip-toed their way forward.

Captain Coldgrip leaned into the last room, and saw a low bed with the light of the doctor's lamp upon it.

He saw the outlines of a human figure under the cover, and a beautiful face, but without any color, on the pillow.

"Gerta!" he exclaimed. "In God's name, what has happened? Tell me!"

He faced the crowd again and looked at the doctor as he spoke.

"The man thar is dead; the girl nearly so. You saw the paper on the man's breast. We found it whar—"

He was going to say, "whar you left it," but did not.

Captain Coldgrip's eyes had suddenly flashed, and this probably checked the doctor.

"You found the paper whar you found the man, eh?" said the detective.

"Yes."

"Do you think I left it there?"

The question was direct, and under the Coldgrip look, Sawbones Sam seemed to lose his courage.

"I see it all now," the detective went on. "I am accused of killing the man yonder, and of dealing the girl a serious blow. Who told you about this cyclone of blood?"

"An Indian—an Apache; the same one who rode off with San Diego Dolph and Injun Nick."

"Where is he?"

"He slipped away arter showin' us ther girl."

"Yet, I am accused of this crime?"

Somebody in the crowd bolder than those who stood in the detective's immediate presence said: "Yes."

At that moment Captain Coldgrip had the whole bronze crowd before him.

Behind him was a wall, and the door leading to Gerta's chamber was at his right.

He could see that the reply to his last words had given the San Tonquin parads new courage. He knew that among them were a dozen men who believed Nugget Nox's charge that he (the captain) had killed Father 'Selmo in the mountain cabin.

It was a moment for prompt action and Captain Coldgrip knew it.

All at once he stepped back almost against the wall.

By this action he cleared a little space of five feet between him and the crowd.

The following moment the New York gold sleuth threw up both arms, and two six-shooters looked the San Tonquinites in the face!

"Gentlemen," he said with a sarcastic accent on the word. "Gentlemen, I deny the crime. The blood of Colonel Smilax is not on my hands, neither is the life of Gerta there. You trust an Apache, a member of the thieving tribe whose representatives you hung a few nights ago. He leads you hither, shows you the girl, and gets away. Is there a man in the crowd now who puts the bloodshed here to-night on me?"

A silence that was startling followed the last word.

Captain Coldgrip was looking over the leveled revolvers into the eyes before him.

He was no longer one man in the power of a crowd; the crowd was at his mercy.

"Now is the time to speak," he went on, in the same tones. "I was accused awhile ago. When did I become innocent?"

There was a smile at his lips at the end of the last sentence.

"If this is Nugget Nox's second game, let him show himself," he went on. "I repeat over these revolvers that I did not kill Colonel Smilax; he was no enemy of mine. You know who he was, I suppose?"

The crowd was silent.

"His child lies in yonder," continued the detective, glancing toward Gerta's room.

"Gerta the dead man's child?" cried the doctor.

"She is. The dead man is Jack Brown, of Brown's Valley, one of the famous men of California a few years ago. I got my information from a person named Dolores, and I call it reliable. The man who killed him set a trap for me. You never thought that the writing on the paper might not be mine?"

"Hang me if we did, captain!" said a coarse voice. "Ther doctor thar said it war probably you whar did ther double act."

"You did, doctor?" and the detective looked at Sawbones Sam. "Ah! I recollect. You are one of the men who took stock in Nugget Nox's little game."

The lank doctor drew back, and some of the crowd laughed.

"Gentlemen, if a man among you will have the kindness to put this double crime on my shoulders, I will proceed to kill him in his boots!" the detective continued, fiercely. "Give me time, and I will show you the real assassin."

"How much time?"

"Three hours."

"The red may be miles an' miles away."

"Always the Indian!" laughed the detective.

"Give him all the time he wants."

"My opinion is we've corraled the wrong man!"

Neither of these sentences crossed the doctor's lips.

He was watching the detective with eyes full of hatred and evil.

"I'll bet my head that it is a part of a play for the lost bonanza," he said to himself. "If this cool man wins, San Tonquin loses everything. What has happened within the last few days? Father 'Selmo and Major Miguel have been killed, Injun Nick has shot right and left, and we all know that his hunt is the Spanish El Dorado. Now a man, said to be Jack Brown and Gerta's father, is shot dead, and the girl fatally wounded. The man called Captain Coldgrip is about to put his hand on the gold find. If he gets there he will hold it. I want a hand in the bonanza myself. If we let this cool-blade go, we may never get another chance at him. Shoot me for a pirate if I see how we are going to hold him, with San Tonquin at the mercy of his revolvers!"

Sawbones Sam was in no jolly mood.

He saw the detective drop his arms and the crowd drew back.

"I ask kind attention to the girl at your hands, gentlemen," he said, moving toward the door.

"The last plays of my game are near at hand. You'll excuse me now. I will see you later."

He was gone and the crowd looked staringly toward the door through which he had passed.

"He is the man after all!" hissed the doctor.

"Follow him out and shoot starlight into him."

"Foller himself yerself, Doctor Sam," replied a stalwart tough with a grin. "I don't want ter order my coffin to-night."

CHAPTER XXXI.

INJUN NICK ONCE MORE.

"THIS is one of your plays, Gold Chick," muttered the detective when he found himself beyond the house and away from the wonder-struck crowd that it held. "I am just learning that you are a cool fellow and slick at certain games. You don't want to see me just now but I'm very anxious to show you a side play. I can see that you would kill Jack Brown but why the girl?"

Then Captain Coldgrip's thoughts wandered to the Indian who had brought the San Tonquin toughs to wounded Gerta.

"I would like to see the red-skin," he said aloud. "If he went off with San Diego Dolph and Injun Nick, he must be Wizard Dick, but what fetched him back?"

A moment later the Gotham spotter was brought to a halt by a figure that had stepped suddenly in his way.

"Wizard Dick, by the eternal!" he cried.

"The Apache is here," was the quick reply, and the young Indian joined the detective and clutched his arm.

"How is the White Flower?" he went on.

"Not going to die, I hope."

"Wizard Dick is glad of that."

"Where did you find her?"

"On the trail."

Captain Coldgrip started.

"On whose trail?"

"Injun Nick's."

His look of surprise increased.

"Wizard Dick thought she was one of the parads of San Tonquin. The stars did not give him much light when he struck."

"Then you did it?" cried the detective.

The red-skin nodded.

Captain Coldgrip drew back and looked at him for a moment.

"Why don't you go back yonder and tell the San Tonquinites?" he asked with a smile. "They were going to riddle me for it."

"Wizard Dick saw them."

"Where were you?"

"At the window. If they had attempted anything against the white bloodhound, they would have died like corraled wolves!" grated the young Indian. "Wizard Dick is glad the White Flower will not die. He struck her by mistake. Where goes the captain now?"

"I am on my way to the bonanza—found at last, Dick!"

The eyes of the red suddenly glittered.

"Is the white man sure he has found it?" he asked.

"I am certain!"

"How big is it?"

"Big enough to enrich a hundred men," said the detective with enthusiasm.

"One hunter will never claim his share."

"Injun Nick, eh?"

"Nugget Nox."

"Oh, the chief of torture!" ejaculated Coldgrip. "Where is my old accuser, Dick?"

"Where the star water falls on his face," was the reply. "Wizard Dick found him in front of the Red Lizard with his shooting iron pulled on Dolph, and the Apache's fingers jumped at his throat."

"I don't want them at mine," smiled the detective as the Indian held up one of his tapering red hands. "I had hoped to deal with Nugget Nox myself or else turn him over to San Tonquin to be tried for shooting Father 'Selmo, but if you have settled with him, I never will."

"He will never wear the white man's halter," was the Apache response. "He would have tumbled Dolph dead against the door if Wizard Dick had not found him. Injun Nick fell into Dolph's hands. The white men gave him up."

"And you and Dolph took him off?"

"Away on the trail toward the llano."

"I see! Dolph is going to subject him to the same torture he once gave him, the terrible thirst and the vultures."

The Indian nodded.

"Do you think Dolph is able to deal with Injun Nick?"

"He is tied in the saddle."

"But he is a veritable Samson when he tries his strength," said the detective quickly. "With this big gold game in the situation in which it now is, I don't want Injun Nick to interfere."

"He will not come back," said Wizard Dick with positiveness.

"I rely on your judgment. You tied him to the horse?"

"Yes."

"If Dolph gets him to the llano Injun Nick's

game will end ingloriously, and in a terrible manner."

"The air wolves will give him beak and talon, as they gave Dolph, and there will be no Apache to come up and drive them off."

The detective tried to picture the scene suggested by the words of the Indian.

A man tied to a horse in the center of a treeless plain, and attacked by a hundred vultures!

He knew that San Diego Dolph had experienced a horror of this kind, but rescue had come at the last moment.

For Injun Nick there was to be no rescue; he was to be taken back to the scene of his heartless cruelty by the very man he had tortured there, turned loose, tied to a horse, and left to a fate too terrible to contemplate!

If Captain Coldgrip could have known the true state of affairs, he would have abandoned these speculations, and in order to show the reader what had happened, let us go back to the Scarlet Hercules and his captor.

We left them riding over the trail, with Wizard Dick waiting in the starlight, knife in hand, for the Flower of San Tonquin.

San Diego Dolph was anxious to know the outcome of the young Indian's reconnaissance, but he did not draw rein and wait for him.

Some minutes passed, and then the gallop of a horse was heard.

"It is Wizard Dick!" thought the sport, but when the animal came up he saw that it was riderless, and not the steed ridden by the Apache.

Injun Nick noticed the same thing, but his eyes did not betray that he was wonder-struck. San Diego Dolph attempted to stop the horse, but he galloped on, and was soon lost to view. Now the Indian would soon come; this was the steed of a victim, and it told Dolph that the Apache's knife had found a human heart.

But an hour wore on and Wizard Dick did not come.

San Diego Dolph looked at his prisoner, and tried to read his thoughts, but in vain.

Injun Nick was sitting bolt upright in the saddle, looking straight ahead, and as immobile as ever.

"This man is a puzzle," said Dolph to himself. "His eyes never betray his intentions. He ought to be thinking of the game I am going to play on the *llano*; perhaps he is, but I will never know it. When I have sent him to the birds I will go back to San Tonquin and help Captain Coldgrip rake in the biggest stakes man ever played for."

San Diego Dolph began to imagine at last that something unlooked-for had happened where Wizard Dick encountered the trailer.

The horses were beginning to show a few signs of fatigue and Dolph checked their speed a little.

"It is a long way to the *llano*, and I need be in no hurry. Maybe the Apache will come up," he murmured.

At that moment an enemy totally unlooked-for was near at hand.

Injun Nick had not been idle for a minute since leaving San Tonquin.

Captain Coldgrip hit the mark when he said that this red bonanza-hunter was a veritable Samson and fertile in cunning.

Injun Nick was trying the bonds that kept his arms at his side. He tried them with a secrecy that escaped even the keen eyes of San Diego Dolph whom he did not watch, thus throwing him "off the track."

Injun Nick's intention was not to go back to the shadowless *llano* for torture, and despite the seeming hopelessness of his situation, he had not relinquished the bonanza game.

Wizard Dick, who had drawn the ropes, had performed the service well, and the red Hercules had cursed him with his flashing eyes and bitter tongue.

Injun Nick felt that the Apache had tied him for good, but this did not prevent him from tugging at his bonds.

He worked mostly with his right arm, the one furthest from San Diego Dolph, and the one that promised to aid him most.

The two horses were passing over a little valley when a gleam of success appeared in the Indian's eyes!

A line of mountains were at their backs, and far ahead the stars went down behind more peaks.

The valley nestled in the soft starlight like some lost Eden, and the wind that swept it was laden with the fragrance of flowers and stirred the long black hair of the two bitter foes.

Injun Nick had cause to be elated.

The hand he had worked under Wizard Dick's cutting cords was almost free.

It was bleeding and lacerated, but that was nothing to the scarlet bonanza demon of the wild Southwest.

He had but to jerk his hand upward and it would be at his service!

Once or twice he threw quick glances at San Diego Dolph.

The horses were close together now, and the knees of their two riders sometimes touched.

All at once the Indian made the move.

As quick as thought, he jerked his right hand loose and threw his body around.

Dolph saw the movement with a thrill of horror at his heart.

"Loose, by heavens!" he cried.

The answer was a half-tigerish cry of victory, and then the bleeding clutch of Injun Nick was at his throat!

It was the work of half a second.

San Diego Dolph fell back, and almost from the saddle, but the grip was not relaxed.

"Injun Nick does not go to the *llano*!" was hissed in his face, as the two horses came together side by side to the red-skin's advantage. "The white-skinned hunter may find the birds again. Hal! why didn't he shoot Injun Nick when he took him from the Red Lizard?"

San Diego Dolph could not answer, for the Satanic clutch that seemed to be robbing him of life.

The loosening of one hand naturally helped the other, and Injun Nick soon had two hands at his command.

He stopped the horses with his voice, and both hands forced Dolph to the verge of insensibility.

Myriads of stars danced before the gold sport's eyes; he saw a thousand grinning imps, and each had the devilish face of Injun Nick.

In a flash the tables had been turned.

"This beats all the hands I ever heard of," gasped Dolph. "It's what I'd call a death flush, or hell's cold deck! Who looked for a swoop like this?"

He saw the blazing eyes of the Indian almost at his cheek, the red fingers appeared to be forcing their way behind his windpipe; they were rendering his own hands useless!

In all his wild life the gold wolf of the Southwest had no experience like this.

It was worse than the fight with the vultures; he preferred them to the demon grip of Injun Nick.

"The Spanish bonanza will yet see the Injun's boss play," said the red-skin, and then he suddenly loosened his hands and San Diego Dolph dropped to the ground like a lifeless person.

As he felt the Indian snatched his bowie and severed the cords that bound his own limbs.

The next moment he was on the ground before his late captor.

San Diego Dolph had passed beyond the power of speech, but he was alive.

Injun Nick raised him and laid him across the saddle, then he took the same ropes which had bound himself, and tied him on.

It was the red Samson's hour.

Half an hour later a solitary horse was moving slowly through the little valley.

A man hung like a corpse across the saddle, and in his back stuck a knife, the tip of whose hilt was solid silver!

San Diego Dolph! and going toward the distant *llano* alone.

Some distance away, and riding toward the dark mountains was an Indian who was a striking picture in the saddle.

All at once he caught his wide-brimmed sombrero and sent it whirling toward the stars, catching it on his red hand when it came down. This was Injun Nick, the bonanza tiger, and his face was turned toward San Tonquin.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BETWEEN FRIEND AND FOE.

LET us precede the Indian gold-hunter and re-enter San Tonquin before he rides into it bent on playing a game redder yet perhaps than any yet played by his merciless hands.

If Sawbones Sam, the bronze surgeon, has come on to the stage at a late period of our drama, he was a dangerous man.

He seemed to grasp events that lay beyond the reach of common men, and when he saw the crowd of toughs leave Gerta's house after Captain Goldgrip had cowed them all, he went back to the girl with anxiety and eagerness in his eyes.

"They wouldn't fight!" he growled in bad humor. "They let the Yankee sleuth look them out of countenance, and he got away. They dare not follow him into the street and fill him with starlight, the cowards!"

The San Tonquin doctor approached Gerta's bed on tiptoe and held the lamp over her face.

She was sleeping quietly, pallid and beautiful, and Sawbones Sam looked at her for several minutes without moving.

"I wonder if she knows the bonanza secret?" he went on. "She used to be Father 'Selmo's ward, and he may have told her. I don't think Captain Coldgrip shed a drop of blood here tonight. I have tried to fire the boys against him, and I'll do it yet if I can."

At that moment much to the man's surprise, Gerta's eyes unclosed and looked at him.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"The Indian?"

"Injun Nick."

The doctor started.

"Ah! you are white, I see; you are not San Diego Dolph who took Injun Nick away. You are Doctor Sam, of San Tonquin."

"That's who I am," said the surgeon.

"What happened? let me think," and the girl shut her eyes again. "I was on the barren at the time. The trail, which is a road there, you know, is easily followed in the starlight. All at

once a body loomed up before me, something came down like an eagle, and then all was dark."

"The blow fell then," said Sam.

"What blow?"

"The knife that passed under your shoulder."

"Heavens! it must have been a knife. Who brought me to San Tonquin?"

"An Indian."

"Not Injun Nick?"

"No, the one who helped take him off—Wizard Dick, the Apache."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing; he only led us to you; then he slipped away."

Gerta moved a hand slowly across her brow.

"Is this a part of the universal game for the bonanza?" she ejaculated.

"It must be!" cried Sam. "See hyer, girl. Why don't you get rid of the secret which evidently nerved that red-skin's arm?"

"I did give it away once."

"When?"

"Only a little while ago."

"To whom?"

"To Injun Nick."

"For nothing?"

"He gave me some important news. Ah! Doctor Sam, you don't want to deal with this secret; the Padre's Palace is a mine of ill-omen."

"What do I care?" said the doctor. "Do I look cowardly? What did you tell Injun Nick?"

"Only a little discovery of mine; there may be nothing in it after all."

"Tell me."

Gerta looked into the deep depths of the eyes that were regarding her.

Before she could reply a slight noise seemed to attract Sawbones Sam's attention.

"Wait a minute," he said in low tones to the girl, and in a moment he was in the other room.

Jack Brown of Brown's Valley lay where the crowd had left him; he was dead enough, but standing in the middle of the room was a man whose appearance startled the doctor.

"Don't rouse the girl, doctor," said this individual coming forward with a springy step. "I am hyer when I ought to be dead. You know me. I am Nugget Nox, the man who got jerked from the San Tonquin galoots by Injun Nick. Yes, I ought to be dead, I say—dead as Judas!"

Doctor Sam's look became a stare. Was the man mad?

"Doctor Sam, you wanted to stay with me when I accused Captain Coldgrip of shooting the Mummy of San Tonquin. I don't care whether you thought him guilty or not. I like you for the disposition you showed then. I want to give you a pointer."

In an instant the heart of Sawbones Sam was in his throat.

"I can't talk very well, for I've felt an Apache's hand behind my windpipe," Nugget Nox went on. "He left me for dead in the grass behind Father 'Selmo's shanty. I've got onto the Spanish bonanza."

The bronze doctor expected a declaration of this kind, but when it came it startled him.

"Fifty men have thought that," he said.

"But I know!" was the quick response. "Can you quit the girl in thar?"

"For business like this!—yes!" exclaimed Sawbones Sam. "I am at your service, Nugget Nox."

"And I'll show you the grandest bonanza in existence. Never mind how I found it. Ask no questions and get no lies. I would have shared it with Injun Nick, but Jack Javert has corraled him."

Doctor Sam stepped to Gerta's door and closed it softly. As he did so he glanced into the room and saw that the girl had gone to sleep again.

He hoped she would sleep till he had tested the strength of Nugget Nox's story.

Injun Nick's chief of torture led the way through the street to the door of the little church.

"It can't be in here!" exclaimed Doctor Sam, drawing back with a glance at the door.

"Wait till I show you."

Nugget Nox opened the door and the twain passed in.

A strange feeling took possession of Doctor Sam when he found himself in the gloom of the padre's chapel.

"I was in here awhile ago," whispered Nugget Nox. "I've looked for bonanzas in a thousand strange places in my time, but never in one like this. Hang me, if I didn't used to think that—"

The sentence was not finished, for the door opened with a slight noise and Doctor Sam's hand had closed on the sport's arm.

Nugget Nox drew a revolver and let it hang downward in his bronze grip.

"Somebody has come in," he whispered in the lowest tones.

"Don't move an inch."

The San Tonquinite was standing like a statue; his heart was in his throat again.

The next minute the person who had glided into the church came toward the breathless two.

"Let him pass," said Injun Nick's pard.

The footsteps passed on until they died away about the wooden altar.

"It is Captain Coldgrip," said Nugget Nox.

"Then we'll play his game out forever!" was the answer.

For a little while all was still within the church and then a match flashed up like a newborn star.

"He will find some wax candles where I found a lot awhile ago," continued Nox. "When he lights one he will have the pleasure of looking into the deadliest pistol in New Mexico. Let me run this game awhile, Doctor Sam. I don't forget that Captain Coldgrip made it necessary for Injun Nick to rescue me from twenty revolvers."

Several minutes later the light which had come into existence was burning steadily like the flame of a wax candle untouched by the wind, and all at once Nugget Nox went forward with a revolver in each hand.

"Hold your light whar it is, Captain Coldgrip!" he said, sternly. "The Injun's right bower has the drop on you."

The man at the candle straightened suddenly and looked at the speaker.

"Great Scot! that is not Captain Coldgrip!" cried Doctor Sam.

"I see now," said Nox. "Injun Nick has come back!"

The two men looked amazed. Standing in the little alcove was the magnificent figure of Injun Nick.

"Pardon this mistake, captain," said Nugget Nox, lowering his revolvers and leaping forward. "I did not look for you after your capture by Dolph and his new pard."

"Dolph can hold nothing!" smiled the red, and his eyes kindled at the thought of the last victory he had won. "But who is this—your pard, Nugget Nox?"

Doctor Sam had advanced within the light of the candle and Injun Nick's eyes were riveted upon him.

"This is Doctor Sam and a friend," said Nox.

"We want no friends, but since he is here we will use him."

Sawbones Sam looked pale. What was the Scarlet Hercules going to do with him?

Indian Nick said no more, but picked up a coil of rope that lay on the floor at his feet, and proceeded to fasten it to a wooden pillar near at hand. Having done this he opened the trap-door and dropped the rope into the shaft.

"The doctor will go down," he said, turning to Sam.

"For heaven's sake, no!" ejaculated the surgeon, drawing back.

"Injun Nick says yes! If he reaches the bottom and is not molested he will give the rope three quick jerks."

"Who may be down there?"

"Captain Coldgrip for one."

"Then, please excuse this pilgrim," said the doctor, but the words only gave a firmer gleam to the Indian's eyes.

"Go down," he said sternly, and Sawbones Sam suddenly felt the muzzle of a revolver against his temple. "This is one of the last plays of the gold game, white doctor. Injun Nick has come back from the trail to make San Tonquin remember him forever. If you are not molested at the bottom of the shaft you will jerk the rope three times."

The doctor looked at Nugget Nox for comfort, but there was none in his eyes.

The chasm yawned at his feet and the rope lost itself in the darkness.

He drew back with a shudder.

"Come, white doctor," said Injun Nick. "The morning will come by and by. Go down!"

There was no help for it and Sawbones Sam swung himself carefully over the pit and caught the rope.

Down he went cautiously, hand over hand. Inches seemed yards, and the shaft entirely bottomless!

At last he touched ground, and the next instant a hand closed over his mouth.

"Send the signal up to the Injun above!" said a voice at his ear. "It is to be three quick jerks; no more!"

But Doctor Sam's power seemed to have deserted him.

"I'll send the signal up myself," said the same voice, and the rope was jerked three times in succession.

"Now, you will keep a still tongue in your head. You don't know how a person can hear sounds from above by placing his ear against the wall of this shaft."

A light chuckle followed these words.

"You are Captain Coldgrip," said Doctor Sam.

"I am Colonel Jove Sloper."

"Colonel Sloper of Golden Gulch?"

"The same. I've been here six months, but thank heaven my term of imprisonment is nearly at an end."

"Where is the Yankee sleuth?"

"Not far away, doctor. He'll be here by the time our friend Injun Nick lands in our presence. Ah! somebody is on the rope now! What do you think of this for a gold game?"

Doctor Sam bit his lip, but said nothing.

"I can see like an owl in this darkness, doctor," Colonel Sloper went on. "Hark! somebody is behind us. It is Captain Coldgrip. Now he will match cards with the red rattler of the Southwest."

The next moment somebody came up in the

gloom and Colonel Sloper's hand found a human arm.

"Captain, I've got the doctor here, and Injun Nick is on the rope," he whispered.

An exclamation of astonishment followed the announcement, and then a voice came down the shaft:

"Captain?—Injun Nick?—Hello!"

The swaying of the rope stopped as if the man coming down had braced himself against the wall.

"I want to tell you that the Apaches hev come back," said the same voice. "They hev come for vengeance. Don't you recollect the reds the San Tonquinites hung in the plaza a few nights ago? The whole town seems full of Injuns. It is doomed!"

"Let it be so!" laughed Injun Nick, in mid-air between friend and foe. "San Tonquin for the Apache! the bonanza for us!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DEVILS INCARNATE.

NUGGET NOX was right—The Apaches had come back and on vengeance bent.

If Injun Nick's chief of torture had stood at the western terminus of San Tonquin, he would have witnessed a scene calculated to terrorize even him.

The hanging of the six Apaches on the plaza, an event with which we have dealt in the course of our story, was bearing fruit.

A band of two hundred of those lawless reds had swooped down upon San Tonquin with ready hands and demoniac yells.

The occupants of the Red Lizard were startled by the shouts and shots, and before the first man could reach the square the Indians were in the town.

They had stolen a march upon the place, had ridden up to the first cabins unobserved, and then, like a lot of infuriated demons, had dashed onward to a scene of destruction.

Nugget Nox, leaning over the gold shaft, made no foolish statement when he said that San Tonquin was doomed.

He knew the Apache, and could say truly that nothing would be spared.

Down the main street of the town and straight for the plaza rode the red avengers.

Their wild yells cut the night, and their firearms sent bullet after bullet through the cabin doors.

Realizing their danger with the first yell, the men of San Tonquin drew their revolvers and rushed toward the veranda.

The lamp hanging beside the door threw a ray of light far out upon the plaza, and showed the sports the wild mixture of men and steeds as they swarmed forward.

"Jehosaphat! the hull nation has come!" cried some one; and so it seemed.

In a moment the half-naked devils were firing into the hotel, and their Winchesters were killing men beyond the door.

It was another memorable night for San Tonquin, if not its last.

A few men stood the rain of bullets and arrows and emptied their weapons into the enemy. Indians tumbled right and left from their blankets, but they were too much for the white toughs.

They guided their horses up to the very edge of the porch, leaped off and charged toward the bar-room.

Twenty dead men lay beyond the bullet-shattered door, but no living person faced the scarlet cyclone.

Into the bar-room and over the counter among the bottles swarmed the Apaches, their yells making the air tremble.

They broke everything breakable, poured the liquor out till the floor was a sea of liquid poison, and then wound up with the torch!

Meanwhile, the Indians left outside were charging cabin after cabin, shooting through the doors and breaking every window.

Nothing was to escape their fury.

San Tonquin had had its day of blood-letting; now the Apache was claiming his.

Cabin after cabin burst into flames, and here and there a man was driven out to be shot down by a dozen bullets.

In one of the houses the young girl heard the storm that had fallen upon San Tonquin.

"Merciful God! the Indian has come!" she exclaimed. "I am helpless, wounded maybe to the death. In God's name, what can I do?"

Need we say that this person was Gerta?

A lamp burned on the table of her little chamber and just out of reach of her hand.

"The light will tell the fiends that my house is inhabited; they will come here, I know these Southwest demons; they spare nobody when on a vengeance trail!"

She exerted herself and reached the lamp. The next moment the room was dark and silent again.

Gerta fell back upon the pillow and waited; she could do no more.

All at once her eyes caught sight of a light through the window beyond the bed, then another and another.

"The vandals have fired the town!" she cried. Nearer and nearer to her little house, as she

could tell by the sounds, rolled the tide of Apache war.

"White girl here?" suddenly asked a voice that thrilled the girl.

The speaker seemed to be bending over her in the darkness, and yet she had not heard anybody enter the room.

Should she reply? Should she tell the intruder, undoubtedly an Indian, that she was there and helpless?

The question was repeated and in tones which told her that the speaker was impatient.

At the same time a hand dropped lightly upon her face.

"The white girl is here," said the same voice. "Wizard Dick is glad."

Wizard Dick! The name had a thrill for the girl, and yet she could hardly tell why.

"I am here, but for heaven's sake respect me. I am wounded. I was stabbed on the trail by some one."

"The Apache knows," was the reply. "The Indian has come for the blood of the hangmen of San Tonquin. He has fired the Red Lizard, and the cabins must all go. Come, white girl."

"Can't you save me here?" asked Gerta, catching the Apache's arm.

"Wizard Dick will try."

The hand was withdrawn and the door of the chamber shut hard.

Gerta did not see the young Indian who went to the front door; she did not see him meet half a dozen yelling Apaches there.

They recoiled at sight of the young buck who stood erect in the glare of their torch.

"Burn the white man's cabin!"

"Death to the pale-skins of San Tonquin!"

Wizard Dick's answer to these yells was a proud flashing of his black eyes. He stepped back a pace, made a sudden movement, and held two revolvers in his hands.

It was Apache against Apache.

"This is Wizard Dick's house," he said to the startled crowd. "The Apache must take his torch elsewhere. He cannot bring it here."

"What white-skin is Wizard Dick's friend?"

"The Flower of San Tonquin!" cried the Indian, and up came the six-shooters. "Wizard Dick is ready to wipe out the men who noosed him on the plaza, but he stands by the white girl who had no hand in it."

The Indians drew off, but the young buck saw a malicious gleam in the eyes of several.

"They will come back," he said. "They want the blood of every white-skin in San Tonquin."

Wizard Dick went back to Gerta's room, and took his station midway between window and door.

The Flower of San Tonquin could see his half-naked figure by the vivid firelight that streamed into the chamber.

Thirty minutes passed, and then the window fell in with a crash.

Wizard Dick sprang forward with the noiselessness of a cat.

The next moment a human figure was on the sill, and then the hand of the watching Indian fell upon it.

There was a suppressed cry of horror, and the girl saw another arm descend and heard another cry.

Wizard Dick dragged something into the room and threw it into one of the darkened corners. Then he took up the watch again.

Beyond the house the whole sky seemed on fire.

"What about the padre's chapel?" asked Gerta.

"It is on fire!"

A startling cry parted the girl's lips.

"Where is Captain Coldgrip and the others who are hunting the Spanish bonanza?" she ejaculated.

Let us try to answer the staggered girl.

We left Injun Nick, as the reader remembers, midway down the gold shaft when Nugget Nox informed him that the Apaches had charged the town.

"Aha!" laughed the Scarlet Hercules. "San Tonquin for the Apache; the bonanza for us!"

After that Injun Nick continued his descent. He did not know that Captain Coldgrip, the cool detective, was waiting for him at the bottom; that the signal of safety which had come up to him a few moments before, had proceeded from him, and not from Doctor Sam.

Captain Coldgrip, with a good deal of impatience and curiosity, was waiting for his prey.

"Here I am, doctor," said the Indian, as he touched ground.

The detective marked the red-skin's position by the sound of his voice.

The next second he threw out his hands and caught Injun Nick. The bloodless hand touched him first.

"Betrayed!" cried the Indian recoiling from Captain Coldgrip's clutch.

"No! only outwitted!" laughed the detective springing after him in the darkness. "This is the Spanish bonanza itself, Injun Nick. By the eternal, we'll play the game out here. Strike a match, colonel."

The maimed Californian did as ordered, and when the little match blazed up it showed Injun

Nick held against the wall by the New York spotter.

"Captain Nick, the red Greasers hev fired the church!" came down the shaft from the man above. "I've got ter come down myself for safety."

"Come down!" shouted Captain Coldgrip, and then he looked into the glittering eyes of his captive.

"You got away from Dolph, I see," he said.

Injun Nick ground his teeth.

"The white man has gone back to his vultures!" he said with a hiss.

"Then you turned the tables on him?"

"I did."

"And sent him bound toward the llano?"

"Bound and dead!"

Meanwhile, Colonel Sloper braced against the wall was holding a candle in the Indian's face.

"Ah, don't you know me, Injun Nick?" he asked with a laugh. "I am Jove Sloper once of Golden Gulch."

Injun Nick made no answer.

"He doesn't want to know the man from whom he once stole certain papers pertaining to this bonanza," the colonel continued.

"Give me a chance and I'll shoot your papers through you!" growled the captive Hercules.

At that moment a wild cry came from above.

The men at the bottom of the shaft looked up.

"Merciful heavens! the trimmings of the alcove ar' on fire!" cried a man, who could be seen on a rope that swayed from wall to wall of the shaft. "I ain't half-way down yet! Jerusalem! Injun Nick, what must I do? The fire will burn the rope away!"

"To the wall!" said Captain Coldgrip. "The rope will part in a minute."

Injun Nick fixed his eyes on the endangered sport overhead.

It was Nugget Nox, his chief of torture.

The Indian clinched his teeth as he looked on.

"Come down like a shot," he cried, as he forgot his own situation.

"Stand aside, then!" came down the shaft.

"Here I— Oh, God! the rope—is gone!"

The next second something like a human body was seen to fall over and over as it grew larger; then it struck at the Indian's feet with a horrible thud!

Colonel Sloper held the little candle down and saw the body move.

"It is the end of Nugget Nox," said Captain Coldgrip.

It was all over with the Indian's pard; the lump of mangled humanity lying on the floor of the gold shaft was dead!

"Come down into the palace, Indian Nick; I want to show you what we've been fighting for," the detective went on. "Doctor Sam will carry the light, for my friend, the colonel, can't walk fast. You will make no hostile move. Turn about is fair play, Captain Nick. The Apaches hold San Tonquin, and I the Spanish bonanza."

The Indian gave the detective a glare from underneath his black lashes, but he said nothing.

"I left Gold Chick here some time ago with Colonel Sloper. The fellow made an attempt to escape and the Californian shot him dead."

Injun Nick started slightly, threw a covert glance toward the Californian hobbling after them, but made no reply.

"You have explored the palace, eh, Injun Nick?" asked Captain Coldgrip.

"No."

"Still, you know of its wealth?"

"I know it is more than enough to make nabobs of us all. It is the stake of our wild game, Claude Coldgrip—the game you left New York to play—the game that cost Jack Javert, Major Miguel, Father 'Selmo and a dozen more their lives. And the Flower of San Tonquin, eh? The Apache is loose above us. He will spare nobody."

Captain Coldgrip could not keep back a cry. "You can't reach her!" Injun Nick went on.

"The child of Jack Brown of Brown's Valley is dead before this! The Apache will go back to his tribe with her hair at his belt! And Injun Nick— Ah! captain, look out!"

The red-skin rushed at the detective like a suddenly unchained bloodhound.

It was the last play.

"Out with the light!" he shouted as he closed with the gold sleuth.

Doctor Sam threw the candle against the wall and the next moment Captain Coldgrip felt himself lifted in mid-air!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE GOLD GAME ENDS.

"I HAVE been in the clutches of this red Satan before now," mentally exclaimed the detective.

"I beat him then, and I must do it again."

The light was out and the cavern was in darkness like that of starless midnight.

"I'm between the devil and the deep sea," said Doctor Sam to himself. "If Injun Nick wins, he will accuse me of signaling a lie up the shaft; if Captain Coldgrip succeeds, I will never touch a nugget in the Spanish bonanza. By Jove! I'm going back."

The sawy surgeon went down the wall feeling his way through the gloom.

"Let them fight it out. I've got enough of

the gold game to last me a lifetime. I am safer here, perhaps, than I would be in San Tonquin if the Apaches have taken it; but anyhow I am really between Satan and the deep sea."

Injun Nick had obtained a moment's mastery by his resistless attack.

He was famous for charges like this, and more than once they had helped him out of deep trouble.

But now he had a man to deal with who was his equal, and in a little time Injun Nick was made aware of this.

The struggle became furious from the moment Doctor Sam extinguished the candle.

Colonel Sloper, with a weapon ready to enter the fray, steadied himself against the wall and waited.

The Indian and the detective swayed back and forth like giants of the arena.

All at once they touched the Californian against the wall.

Colonel Sloper started and threw out his hand; it touched a bare throat and instantly closed there! "This is the red serpent!" ejaculated Sloper as the two men dragged him by main force from the wall.

The next moment the whole cavern rung with a tremendous report, and the detective was blinded by a flash. Something warm struck his face and his hands, and Injun Nick fell back.

"Who did this?" cried the gold sleuth. "Who shot Injun Nick from my hands?"

"I did," said a voice. "I found the scarlet wolf's throat and I blew him into kingdom come!"

"I had the call on him."

"Sorry to hear that you didn't need help, captain; but I couldn't see in the darkness. I'll strike a match an' see what I did."

Two men leaned forward as Colonel Sloper's match began to dissipate the gloom.

All at once Captain Coldgrip uttered a cry.

"Dead this time! Look! the red cat of nine lives will trouble us no more!"

On the ground of the gold-cavern lay the scarlet pest of the Southwest.

"Dead enough, captain," said Sloper, as he looked into the detective's face.

"Then I will never throw him back into the hands of San Tonquin."

"To have had him surrendered over to somebody who had a prior claim on him?"

"There is no Dolph now, if he did not lie," replied the detective.

"And if Nugget Nox spoke the truth just before he came down the shaft, there is no San Tonquin. The Indians—"

"Ah! the girl—Gerta—is at the mercy of the red horde!"

Captain Coldgrip sprang back to the main shaft.

He found the floor covered with cinders, and more were falling from above.

The church was burning!

"I must try the new door," he said, coming back. "You will wait for me here, colonel."

And he was gone.

The detective flitted from corridor to corridor with a light in his hand.

At last he reached what seemed a bottomless pit, but he swung himself over the edge, and found a ladder against the wall.

"Father 'Selmo had two doors to the bonanza," he said. "The one I am seeking he used as occasion required. It was a stroke of luck—downright good fortune—when I found it."

It is not our intention to follow the daring detective.

A few minutes later he stood under the stars, and looked upon a scene that appalled him.

It was "doomed San Tonquin," sure enough!

"The accursed red Centaurs have spared nothing!" burst from his throat, and then came up from the burning town a yell that seemed to shake the lights overhead.

The next moment the sound of hoofs struck the detective's ears, and he drew back, revolvers in hand.

All at once the head of the Apache column appeared, and with yells and shouts of wild triumph, the whole merciless squadron dashed by.

The game was over; the destroyers were leaving the destroyed.

"Indians they are," he said, "and San Tonquin deserved a good deal of this."

He let the whole band go by, and as the last yelling buck vanished, he turned and ran toward the town.

At first look he thought that not a house had escaped destruction, and his amazement was complete when he saw Gerta's home intact but blackened from roof to step.

Captain Coldgrip opened the door and rushed in, but a figure dashed at him through a dim lamplight, and he was caught in a vise of human hands.

"Wizard Dick!" cried the detective.

"The captain of the bloodless hand!" was the quick response, and the grip loosened and Coldgrip was free.

"Wizard Dick has stayed with the white girl he struck on the night trail," resumed the Indian. "Now that the captain has come, he will go."

"Show me the girl," said the sleuth, and the Apache pointed toward the door.

In a moment the detective was looking into the white face and wonder eyes of the Flower of San Tonquin.

"Wizard Dick?" called the detective after a few low words with the girl.

There was no reply, and the room behind him had no tenant save Jack Brown's corpse.

Wizard Dick was gone!

"He said he could go when you came," said Gerta, and then she smiled. "This is the end of the Spanish bonanza game. I pray there may never be another like it."

The morning of the next day showed the ruins of San Tonquin.

One by one the few living inhabitants came back, and the bronze stalwarts swore an oath of vengeance against the whole Apache nation.

"Where were you going when Wizard Dick stabbed you?" the detective asked the girl.

"I was following Injun Nick and his captors. The Indian told me something about Colonel Smilax, or Jack Brown, my father, and I wanted to know more. Ah! if I had known that he would come to San Tonquin I should have remained. He came here to his death—I know that now."

"And the assassin met his also," said Captain Coldgrip. "Colonel Sloper, who shot Gold Chick in the bonanza mine, found the last message of Jack Brown. It is a strange deed of the Spanish mine to you, Gerta."

The girl's eyes opened with astonishment.

"But the deed won't stand!" she cried.

"We will see about that," was the firm response, and Captain Coldgrip's eyes flashed resolutely when he finished.

It is three months later.

San Tonquin has risen from its ashes, but its buildings have not the substantiality of some of the old ones.

There is no new Red Lizard Hotel, and where Father 'Selmo's little church stood are derricks and piles of mining tools.

"I thought I'd see how things war runnin' hyer, cap'n," says a big bronzed man, who rides up to a handsome gentleman near the mouth of the gaping shaft.

"Great Caesar! San Diego Dolph!" is the response.

"Or Jack Javert—just as you please, cap'n. I'm hyer, big as life, with a knife-hole healin' under my shoulder, and wuth a dozen dead galoots. Whar's that pesky Injun?"

"Injun Nick held the poor hand of the game when the real fight took place."

San Diego Dolph is silent for a moment.

"What's she worth?" he says, looking down the shaft.

"More than the mine."

"Oh, I don't mean the girl," laughs Dolph. "I'm talking about the bonanza."

Captain Coldgrip flushes, and says that the Spanish bonanza may yield a million or so.

Not long afterward the man whom we have followed through thick and thin disappeared suddenly from the new San Tonquin.

He turned up in New York, and was embraced by a beautiful young girl, whom he called Estelle.

Then came from his lips the story of the hunt and fight for the Padre's Palace.

He told Estelle, among other things, that he had found her long-lost brother, but dead on the porch of the Red Lizard, killed by the merciless trailer and gold-hunter serpent, Injun Nick.

He learned from the girl that Colonel Julius Cantwell who had sent him upon the gold hunt was dead.

"It is well," said the captain. "The prize belongs to Gerta, and Gerta to me."

His eyes laughed when he spoke and the girl caught his arm.

"You found the bonanza and a wife did you?" she cried.

"The wife, by and by!" was the answer. "I am back once more in New York, and woe to the law-breakers who make me hunt them within the next six-months!"

"Why within that time?"

"Then I leave the business forever!"

Need we go back to the wild Southwest, reader?

If we must, it shall be to say that the San Tonquinites respected Jack Brown's legacy and gave the Padre's Palace to Gerta without a word.

Colonel Sloper, the underground prisoner, saw the light at last, and became the manager of the mine, which position enables him to pass the remainder of his days in luxury.

Wizard Dick went back to his tribe, or elsewhere, and San Diego Dolph, with a good present in nuggets from Gerta, sought other fields of adventure.

The fate of the gold-hunters who failed is known.

Doctor Sam escaped from the mine and made himself scarce, while in the well-populated cemetery of San Tonquin, sleeps the red foil of the bonanza game—Injun Nick.

Of Captain Coldgrip and his last big trail, deep in the heart of Gotham, we may write in the future, believing that the reader would meet him again.

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